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NANCY.

A NOVEL.

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON,

AUTHOR OF

"'GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART!'" "RED AS A ROSE IS SHE," ETC., ETC.

"As through the land at eve we went,
And plucked the ripened ears,
We fell out, my wife and I,
Oh, we fell out, I know not why,
And kissed again with tears."

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NANCY.

CHAPTER I.

"Put into a small preserving-pan three ounces of fresh butter, and, as soon as it is just melted, add one pound of brown sugar of moderate quality—"

"Not moderate; the browner the better," interpolates Algy.

"Cannot say I agree with you. I hate brown sugar—filthy stuff!" says Bobby, contradictiously.

"Not half so *filthy* as white, if you come to that," retorts Algy, loftily, looking up from the lemon he is grating, to extinguish his brother. "They clear white sugar with but—"

"Keep these stirred gently over a clear fire for about fifteen minutes," interrupt I, beginning to read again very fast, in a loud, dull recitative to hinder further argument, "or until a little of the mixture dipped into cold water breaks clear between the teeth without sticking to them. When it is boiled to this point it must be poured out immediately or it will burn."

Having galloped jovially along, scorning stops, I here pause out of breath. We are a large family, we Greys, and we are *all* making taffy. Yes, every one of us. It would take all the fingers of one hand, and the thumb of the other, to count us, O reader. Six! Yes, six. A Frenchman might well hold up his hands in astonied horror at the insane prolificness—the foolhardy fertility—of British householders. We come very *improbably* close together, except Tou Tou, who was an afterthought. There are no two of us, I am proud to say, exactly simultaneous, but we have come tumbling on each other's heels into the world in so hot a hurry that we evidently expect to find it a pleasant place when we get there. Perhaps we do—perhaps we do not; friends, you will hear and judge for yourselves.

A few years ago when we were little, people used to say that we were quite a pretty sight, like little steps one above another. We are big steps now, and no one any longer hazards the suggestion of our being pretty. On the other hand, nobody denies that we are each as well furnished with legs, arms, and other etceteras, as our neighbors, nor can affirm that we are notably more deficient in wits than those of our friends who have arrived in twos and threes.

We are in the school-room, the big bare school-room, that has seen us all—that is still seeing some of us—unwillingly dragged, and painfully goaded up the steep slopes of book-learning. Outside, the March wind is roughly hustling the dry, brown trees and pinching the diffident green shoots, while the round and rayless sun of late afternoon is staring, from behind the elm-twigs, in at the long maps on the wall, in at the high chairs—tall of back, cruelly tiny of seat, off whose rungs we have kicked all the paint—in at the green-baize table, richly freaked with splashes. Hardly less red than the sun's, are our burnt faces gathered about the fire.

This fire has no flame—only a glowing, ruddy heart, on which the bright brass saucepan sits; and kneeling before it, stirring the mess with a long iron spoon, is Barbara. Algy, as I have before remarked, is grating a lemon. Bobby is buttering soup-plates. The Brat—

the Brat always takes his ease if he can—is peeling almonds, fishing delicately for them in a cup of hot water with his finger and thumb; and I, Nancy, am reading aloud the receipt at the top of my voice, out of a greasy, dog's-eared cookery-book, which, since it came into our hands, has been the innocent father of many a hideous compound. Tou Tou alone, in consideration of her youth, is allowed to be a spectator. She sits on the edge of the table, swinging her thin legs, and kicking her feet together.

Certainly we deteriorate in looks as we go downward. In Barbara we made an excellent start: few families a better one, though we say it that should not. Although in Algy there was a slight falling off, it was not much to complain of. But I am sensibly uglier than Algy (as indeed he has, on several occasions, dispassionately remarked to me); the Brat than me; Bobby than the Brat; and so steadily on, till we reach our nadir of unhandsomeness in Tou Tou. Tou Tou is our climax, and we certainly defy our neighbors and acquaintances to outdo her.

Hapless young Tou Tou! made up of the thinnest legs, the widest mouth, the invisiblest nose, and over-visiblest ears, that ever went to the composition of a child of twelve years.

"Keep stirring always! You must take care that it does not stick to the bottom!" say I, closing the receipt-book, and speaking on my own account, but still as one having authority.

"All very well to say 'Keep stirring always,'" answers Barbara, turning round a face unavoidably pretty, even though at the present moment deeply flame-colored; eyes still sweetly laughing with gay good-humor, even though half burnt out of her head, to answer me; "but if you had been stirring as long as I have, you would wonder that you had any arm left to stir with, however feebly.—Here, one of you boys, take a turn! You Brat, you never do any thing for your living!"

The Brat complies, though not with eagerness. They change occupations: the Brat stirs, and she fishes for almonds. Ten minutes pass: the taffy is done, and what is more it really is taffy. The upshot of our cookery is in general so startlingly indifferent from what we had intended, that the result in the present case takes us by surprise. We all prove practically that, in the words of the receipt-book, it "breaks clear between the teeth without sticking to them." It is poured into Bobby's soup-plate, and we have thrown up the window-sashes, and set it on the ledge to cool. The searching wind blows in dry and biting. Now it is rushing in a violent current through the room, for the door has opened. Mother enters.

"To what may we attribute the honor of this visit?" says Algy, turning away from the window to meet her, and setting her a chair. Bobby gives her a kiss, and the Brat a lump of taffy, concerning which it would be invidious to predicate which were the stickier; so exceedingly adhesive are both.

"Your father says," begins she, sitting down. She is interrupted by a loud and universal groan.

"Says what? Something unpleasant of course, who is it now? Who has done any thing now? I do hope it is the Brat," cries Bobby, viciously; "it is quite his turn; he has been good boy of the family for the last week."

"I dare say it is," replies the Brat, resignedly; "one can't expect such prosperity as mine to last forever."

"Of course it is *I*," says Algy, rather bitterly, "it is always I. I have never been good boy since I was ploughed; and, please God, I never will be again."

"But what is it? what is it? About how bad is it? Is it to be one of our worst rows?"

We are all speaking together at the top of our voices; indeed, we rarely employ a lower key.

"It is no one; no one has done any thing," replies mother, when, at last, we allow her to make herself heard, "only your father sends you a message that, as Sir Roger Tempest is coming here to-day, he hopes you will make less noise this evening in here than you did last night: he says he could hardly hear the sound of his own voice."

"Ahem!" "Very likely!" "I dare say!" in different tones of angry incredulity.

"He begs you to see that the swing-door is shut, as he does not wish his friend to imagine that he keeps a private lunatic asylum."

A universal snort of indignation.

"If we are bedlamites, we know who made us so. We will tell old Roger if he asks," etc.

"For my part," say I, resolutely pinching my lips together as I kneel on the carpet, and violently hammer the now cold and hard taffy with the handle of the poker, which in its day has been put to many uses vile, "I can tell you that I shall not dine with you to-night: I should infallibly say something to father—something unfortunate—I feel it rising; and it would be unseemly to have one of our *émeutes* before this old gentleman, would not it?"

"They are nice breezy things when you are used to them," says Barbara, laughing; "but one requires to be brought up to them."

"Do not you dine either, Brat," say I, looking up, and waving the poker with suave command at him, "and we will broil bones for tea, and roast potatoes on the shovel."

"Some of you must dine," says poor mother, rather wearily, "or your father—"

"He cannot complain if we send our two specimen ones," say I, again looking up, and indicating Barbara and Algy with my weapon, "our sample figs; if Sir Robert—Sir Robin—Sir Roger—what is he?—does not see the rest of us, he may perhaps imagine that we are all equally presentable, which would be more to your credit, mother, than if Bobby and Tou Tou and I were submitted to the poor old thing's notice."

Mother looks rather at sea.

"What are you talking about? What poor old thing? Oh! I understand."

"He will have to see us," says Tou Tou, rather lugubriously, "he cannot help it—at prayers."

Tou Tou has descended from the table, and is standing propped against mother's knee, twisting one leg with ingenious grace round the other.

"Bless your heart," says the Brat, comfortingly, "he will never find out that we are there; do you suppose that his blear old eyes will see all across that big room, economically lit up by one pair of candles?"

Mother smiles.

"Wait till you see whether he has blear eyes!"

"He must be pretty ancient," says Algy, in all the insolence of twenty, leaning his flat back against the mantel-shelf, "as he was at school with father."

"Father has not blear eyes," remarks Bobby, dryly. "Would God he had! For then perhaps he would not see our little vices quite so clearly with them as he does."

"But then father has not been in India," retorts Algy, stretching. "India plays the deuce with one's organs and appurtenances."

"I wish you joy of him," say I, rising flushed and untidy from my knees, having successfully smashed the taffy into little bits; "from soup to walnuts, you will have to undergo a ceaseless tyranny of tales about hit-maghars and dak bungalows and Choto Lazery: which of us has not suffered in our day from the horrible monotony of ideas of an old Indian?"

"Never you mind, Barbara!" cries the Brat, giving her a sounding brotherly pat on the back. "Pay no attention to her."

"'What great events from trivial causes spring!' as the poet says: "you may live to bless the day that old Roger crossed our doors."

"As how?" says Barbara, laughing, and rocking herself backward and forward in a veteran American rocking-chair which, at different periods of our history, has served most of us the dirty turn of tipping us over, and presenting us reversed to the eyes of our family.

"Never you mind," repeats the Brat, oracularly; "truth is stranger than fiction! odd things happen: I read in the paper the other day of a man who pulled up the window for an old woman in the train, and she died at once—I do not mean on the spot, but very soon after, and when she died—listen, please, all of you—" (speaking very slowly and impressively)—"she left him *two thousand pounds* a year."

"I wish I saw the application," answers Barbara, still rocking and sighing.

"Mind that you set a stool for his gouty foot," says Algy, feeling for his faint mustache, "and run and search for his spectacle-case, when he has mislaid it."

"Seriously," say I, "what a grand thing it would be for the family if he were to adopt you, Barbara!"

"Or me," suggests the Brat, standing before the fire with his coat-tails under his arm. "Why not *me?* My manners to the aged are always considered particularly happy."

"Here he is!" cries Tou Tou from the

window, whither she has retired, and now stands, like a heron, on one leg, leaning her elbow on the sill. "Here is the dog-cart turning the corner!"

We all make a rush to the casement.

"Yes, there he is! sure enough! our future benefactor!" says Algy, looking over the rest of our heads, and making a counterfeit greeting.—"Welcome, welcome, good old man!"

"And father, all affability, pointing out the house," supplements Bobby.

We laugh grimly.

"But who is it he has in the fly?" say I, as a second vehicle follows the first. "His harem, I suppose! half a dozen old Wampoos."

"His valet, to be sure," replies the Brat, chidingly, "with his stays, and his evening wig, and the calves of his legs."

CHAPTER II.

The wind is even colder than it was, stronger and more withering now that the sun's faint warmth is withdrawn, and that the small and chilly stars possess the sky. Nevertheless, both the school-room windows are open. We are all huddled shivering round the hearth, yet no one talks of closing them. The fact is, that amateur cooking, though a graceful accomplishment, has its penalties, and that at the present moment the smell of broiled bones and fried potatoes that fills our place of learning is something appalling. Why may not it penetrate beneath the swing-door, through the passages, and reach the drawing-room? Such a thing has happened once or twice before. At the bare thought we all quake. I am in the pleasant situation, just at present, of owning a chilled body and a blazing face.

Chiefest among the cooks have I been, and now I am sitting trying to fan my red cheeks and redder nose, with the back of an old atlas, gutted in some ancient broil, trying, in deference to Sir Roger, to cool down my appearance a little against prayer-time. Alas! that epoch is nearer than I think. Ting! tang! the loud bell is ringing through the house. My hair is loosened and tumbled with stooping over the fire, and I have burnt a hole right in the fore front of my gown, by letting a hot cinder fall from the grate upon it. There is, however, now no time to repair these dilapidations. We issue from our lair, and *en route* meet the long string of servants filing from their distant regions. How is it that the cook's face is so much, *much* less red than mine? Prayers are held in the justicing-room, and thither we are all repairing. The accustomed scene bursts on my eye. At one end the long, straight row of the servants, immovably devout, staring at the wall, with their backs to us. In the middle of the room, facing them, father, kneeling upon a chair with his hands clutched, and his eyes closed, repeating the church prayers, as if he were rather angry with them than otherwise. Mother, kneeling on the carpet beside him, like the faithful, ruffed, and farthingaled wife on a fifteenth-century tomb. Behind them, again, at some little distance, we and our visitor. With the best will in the world to do so, I can get but a meagre view of the latter. The room is altogether rather dark, it being one of our manners and customs not to throw much light on prayers, and he has chosen the darkest corner of it. I only vaguely see the outline of a kneeling figure, evidently neither bulky nor obese, of a flat back and vigorous shoulders. His face is generally hidden in his hands, but once or twice he lifts it to scan the proportions of my late grandfather's preposterously fat cob, whose portrait hangs on the wall above his head.

There is no doubt that on some days the devil reigns with a more potent sway over people than on others. To-night he has certainly entered into the boys. He often does a little, but this evening he is holding a great and mighty carnival among them. While father's strong, hard voice vibrates in a loud, dull monotone through the silent room, they are engaged in a hundred dumb yet ungodly antics behind his back.

Algernon has thrust his head far out between the rungs of his chair-back, and affects to be unable to withdraw it again, making movements of simulated suffocation. The Brat is steadily walking on his knees across the space that intervenes between them to Barbara, with intent, as I too well know, of unseemly pinchings. If father unbutton his eyes, or move

his head one barley-corn, we are all dead men. I hold my breath in a nervous agony. Thank Heaven! the harsh recitation still flows on with equable loud slowness. In happy ignorance of his offspring's antics, father is still asking, or rather ordering, the Almighty (for there is more of command than entreaty in his tone) to prosper the High Court of Parliament. Also the Brat is now returning to his place, traveling with surprising noiseless rapidity over the Turkey carpet, dragging his shins and his feet after him. I draw a long breath of relief, and drop my hot face into my spread hands. My peace, however, is not of long duration. I am aroused again by a sort of choking snort from Tou Tou, who is beside me—a snort that seems compounded of mingled laughter and pain, and, looking up, detect Bobby in the act of deftly puncturing one of her long bare legs with a long brass pin, which he has found straying, after the vagabond manner of pins, over the carpet.

I raise myself, and lean over Tou Tou, to give the offender a silent buffet of admonition, and, lifting my eyes apprehensively to see if I am noticed, I meet the blear eyes of Sir Roger fixed upon mine. He has turned his face quite toward me, and a ray from the candles falls full upon it. *Blear!* Well, if his eyes are blear, then henceforth blear must bear a different signification from the unhandsome one it has hitherto worn. Henceforth it must mean blue as steel: it must mean clear as a glass of spring-water; keen as a well-tempered knife; kindly as the early sunshine.

I am so astonished at my discovery, that I remain for full two minutes staring blankly at the object of it, while he also looks stealthily at me; then recollecting my manners, I burrow my face into my chair-bottom, and so remain until mother's gentle Amen, and a noise of shuffling and scrambling to their feet on the part of the congregation, tell me that the end has come.

We all go up to father, and coldly and stiffly kiss him. While I am waiting for my turn to receive our parent's chilly salute, I steal a second glance at our guest. Yes, he is old certainly. Despite the youth of his eyes, despite the uprightness, the utter freedom from superfluous flesh—from the ugly shaky bulkiness of age—in his tall and stalwart figure, still he is old—old in the eyes of nineteen—as old as father, perhaps—though in much better preservation—forty-eight or forty-nine; for is not his hair iron-gray, and his heavy mustache, and the thick and silky beard that falls on his broad breast, are they not iron gray too? I have dropped my small and unwilling kiss on father's forehead—and said "good-night" in a tone as suppressedly hostile as his own. Now I may go. We may all go. I am the last, or I think I am, to pass through the swing-door. I hurry along the passage to join the rest in the school-room. I upbraid the boys for the rash impiety of their demeanor. I feel a foot on my garments behind, and hear a long, cracking sound that I too, too well know to mean *gathers*.

"You beast!" cry I, in good nervous English, turning sharply round with my hand raised in act to strike, "that is the third time this week that you have torn out my—"

I stop dumfounded. If I mean to box the offender's ears, I must raise my hand considerably higher than it is at present. Angels and ministers of grace! what has happened? I have called General Sir Roger Tempest a *beast*, and offered to cuff him. For a moment, I say, I am dumfounded. Then—for shyness has never been my besetting sin, and something in the genial laughter of his eyes reassures me—I hold out the injured portion of my raiment, and say:

"Look! when you see what you have done, you will forgive me; but of course I meant it for Bobby. I never dreamt it was you."

He takes hold of one end of the rent, I of the other, and we both examine it.

"How exceedingly clumsy of me! how could it have happened? I beg your pardon ten thousand times."

In his words there are polite remorse and solicitude; in his face only a friendly mirth. He is old, that is clear. Had he been young, he would have said, with that variety and suitability of epithets so characteristic of this generation:

"I am awfully sorry! how awfully stupid of me! what an awful duffer I am!"

The gas is shining in its garish yellow brightness full down upon us, as we stand together, illuminating my plain, scorched face,

the slatternly looseness of my hair, and the burnt hole in my gown.

"You will have to give me another," I say, looking up at him and smiling. I should not have thought of saying it if he had been a young man, but with a *vieux papa* one may be at one's ease.

"There is nothing in the world I should like better," he says, with a sort of hurry and eagerness, not very suggestive of a *vieux papa;* "but really—" (seeing me look rather ashamed of my proposition)—"is it *quite* hopeless? the damage quite irremediable?

"On the contrary," reply I, tucking my gathers in, with a graceful movement, at the band of my gown, "five minutes will make it as good as new—at least" (casting a disparaging eye over its frayed and taffy-marked surface), "as good as it ever will be in this world."

A little pause.

"I suppose I have lost my way," he says, thinking, I fancy, that I look rather eager to be gone. "I am never very good at the geography of a strange house."

"Yes," say I, promptly; "you came through *our* door, instead of your own; shall I show you the way back?"

"Since I have come so far, may not I come a little farther?" he asks glancing rather longingly at the half-open school-room door, whence sounds of pious mirth are again beginning to reissue.

"Do you mean *really?*" ask I, with a highly-dissuasive inflection of voice. "Please not to-night; we are all higgledy-piggledy—at sixes and sevens! To tell you the truth, we have been *cooking*. I wonder you did not smell it in the drawing-room."

Again he looks amused.

"May not I cook too? I *can*, though you look disbelieving; there are few people that can beat me at an Irish stew when I set my mind to it."

A head (Bobby's) appears round the school-room door.

"I say Nancy, who are you colloquing with out there? I believe you have got hold of our future benefact—"

An "oh!" of utter discomfiture, and the head is withdrawn.

"I am keeping you," Sir Roger says. "Well, I will say good-night. You will shake hands, won't you, to show that you bear no malice?"

"That I will," reply I, heartily stretching out my right hand, and giving his a cordial shake. For was not he at school with father?

CHAPTER III.

Day has followed night. The broiled smell has at length evacuated the school-room, but a good deal of taffy, spilt in the pouring out, still adheres to the carpet, making it nice and sticky. The wind is still running roughly about over the earth, and the yellow crocuses, in the dark-brown garden-borders, opened to their widest extent, are staring up at the sun. How *can* they stare so straight up at him without blinking? I have been trying to emulate them—trying to stare, too, up at him, through the pane, as he rides laughing, aloft in the faint far sky; and my presumptuous eyes have rained down tears in consequence. I am trying now to read; but a hundred thousand things distract me: the sun shining warm on my shoulder, as I lean against the window; the divine morning clamor of the birds; their invitations to come out that will take no nay; and last, but oh! not, *not* least, the importunate voices of Barbara and Tou Tou. Every morning at this hour they have a weary tussle with the verb "aimer," "to love." It is hard that they should have pitched upon so tender-hearted a verb for the battle-field of so grim a struggle:

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.
Nous aimons,	We love.
Vous aimez,	You love.
Ils aiment,	They love.

This, with endless variations of ingenious and hideous inaccuracies—this, interspersed with foolish laughter and bitter tears, is what I have daily been audience to, for the last two months. The day before yesterday a great stride was taken; the present tense was pronounced vanquished, and Barbara and her pupil passed on in triumph to the imperfect, "j'aimais, I loved, or was loving." To-day, in order to be quite on the safe side, a return has been made to "j'aime," and it has been discovered that

it has utterly disappeared from our young sister's memory. "J'aimais, I loved, or was loving," has entirely routed and dispersed his elder brother, "j'aime, I love." The old strain is, therefore, desperately resumed:

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves, etc.

It is making me drowsy. Ten minutes more, and I shall be asleep in the sun, with my head down-dropped on the window-sill. I get up, and, putting on my out-door garments, stray out into the sun, leaving Barbara—her pretty forehead puckered with ineffectual wrath—and Tou Tou—blurred with grimy tears—to their death-struggle with the restive verb "to love." It is the end of March, and when one can hide round a corner from the wind, one has a foretaste of summer, in the sun's warm strength. I gaze lovingly at the rich brown earth, so lately freed from the frost's grasp, through which the blunt green buds are gently forcing themselves. I look down the flaming crocus throats—the imperial purple goblets with powdery gold stamens—and at the modest little pink faces of the hepaticas. All over our wood there is a faint yet certain purply shade, forerunner of the summer green, and the loud and sweet-voiced birds are abroad. O Spring! Spring! with all your searching east winds, with your late, shriveling frosts, with your occasional untimely sleets and snows, you are yet as much better than summer as hope is better than fruition.

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.

It runs in my head like some silly refrain. I meet Bobby. I also meet Vick., my little shivering, smooth, white terrier. They both join me. The one wriggles herself into the shape of a trembling comma, and, foolishly chasing herself, rolls over on her back, to demonstrate her joy at my advent. The other says:

"Come into the kitchen-garden, and see whether the apricot-flowers are out on the south wall."

We pace along the broad and even gravel walk among the red cabbages and the sea-kale, basking in the sun, whose heat we feel undiminished by the influence of any bitter blast, in the prison of these four high walls, against which the long tree-branches are pinioned. In one place, the pinioning has failed. A long, flower-laden arm has burst from its bonds, and is dangling loosely down. There is a ladder against the wall, set for the gardener to replace it.

"Is it difficult to get up a ladder, Bobby?" ask I, standing still.

"Difficult! Bless your heart, no! Why?"

"One can see nothing here," I answer. "I should like to climb up and sit on the top of the wall, where one can look about one."

My wish is easy of gratification. Bobby holds the ladder, and I climb cautiously, rung by rung. Having reached the summit, I sit at ease, with my legs loosely dangling. There is no broken glass, there are no painful bottoms of bottles to disturb my ruminant quiet. The air bites a little, but I am warmly clad, and young. Bobby sits beside me, whistling and kicking the bricks with his heels. There is the indistinctness of fine weather over the chain of low round hills that bound our horizon, giving them a dignity that, on clearer days, they lack. As I sit, many small and pleasant noises visit my ears, sometimes distinct, sometimes mixed together; the brook's noise, as it runs, quick and brown, between the flat, dry March fields; the gray geese's noise, as they screech all together from the farm-yard; the church-bells' noise, as they ring out from the distant town, whose roofs and vanes are shining and glinting in the morning sun.

"Do you hear the bells?" say I. "Some one has been married this morning."

"Do not you wish it was you?" asks Bobby, with a brotherly grin.

"I should not mind," reply I, picking out a morsel of mortar with my finger and thumb. "It is about time for one of us to move off, is not it? And Barbara has made such a signal failure hitherto, that I think it is but fair that I should try my little possible."

"All I ask of you is," says Bobby, gravely, "not to take a fellow who has not got any shooting."

"I will make it a *sine qua non*," I answer, seriously.

A louder screech than ever from the geese, accompanied with wing-flappings. How unanimous they are! There is not a voice wanting.

"I wonder how long Sir Roger will stay?" I say presently.

"What connection of ideas made you think of him?" asks Bobby, curiously. "Do you suppose that he has any shooting?"

I break into a laugh.

"I do not know, I am sure. I do not think it matters much whether he has or not."

"I dare say that there are a good many women—old ones, you know—who would take him, old as he is," says Bobby, with liberality.

"I dare say," I answer. "I do not know. I am not old, but I am not sure that I would not rather marry him than be an old maid."

A pause. Again I laugh—this time a laugh of recollection.

"What a fool you did look last night!" I say with sisterly candor, "when you put your head round the school-room door, and found that you had been witty about him to his face!"

Bobby reddens, and aims a bit of mortar at a round-eyed robin that has perched near us.

"At all events, I did not call him a *beast*."

"Well, never mind; do not get angry! What did it matter?" say I, comfortingly. "You did not mention his name. How could he tell that he was our benefactor? He did not even know that he was to be; and I begin to have misgivings about it myself."

"I cannot say that I see much signs of his putting his hands into his breeches-pocket," says Bobby, vulgarly.

There is the click of a lifted latch. We both look in the direction whence comes the sound. He of whom we speak is entering the garden by a distant door.

"Get down, Bobby!" cry I, hurriedly, "and help me down. Make haste! quick! I would not have him find me perched up here for *worlds*."

Bobby gets down as nimbly as a monkey. I prepare to do likewise.

"Hold it steady!" I cry nervously, and, so saying, begin to turn round and to stretch out one leg, with the intention of making a graceful descent backward.

"Stop!" cries Bobby from the bottom, with a diabolical chuckle. "I think you observed just now that I looked a fool last night! perhaps you will not mind trying how it feels!"

So saying, he seizes the ladder—a light and short one—and makes off with it. I cry, "Bobby! Bobby!" suppressedly, several times, but I need hardly say that my appeal is addressed to deaf ears. I remain sitting on the wall-top, trying to look as if I did not mind, while grave misgivings possess my soul as to the extent of strong boot and ankle that my unusual situation leaves visible. Once the desperate idea of jumping presents itself to my mind, but the ground looks so distant, and the height so great, that my heart fails me.

From my watch-tower I trace the progress of Sir Roger between the fruit-trees. As yet, he has not seen me. Perhaps he will turn into another walk; and leave the garden by an opposite door, I remaining undiscovered. No! he is coming toward me. He is walking slowly along, a cigar in his mouth, and his eyes on the ground, evidently in deep meditation. Perhaps he will pass me without looking up. Nearer and nearer he comes, I hold my breath, and sit as still as a stone, when, as ill-luck will have it, just as he is approaching quite close to me, utterly innocent of my proximity, a nasty, teasing tickle visits my nose, and I sneeze loudly and irrepressibly. Atcha! atcha! He starts, and, not perceiving at first whence comes the unexpected sound, looks about him in a bewildered way. Then his eyes turn toward the wall. Hope and fear are alike at an end. I am discovered. Like Angelina, I—

> . . . . "stand confessed,
> A maid in all my charms."

"How—on—earth—did you get up there?" he asks, in an accent of slow and marked astonishment, not unmixed with admiration.

As he speaks, he throws away his cigar, and takes his hat off.

"How on earth am I to get down again? is more to the purpose," I answer, bluntly.

"I could not have believed that any thing but a cat could have been so agile," he says, beginning to laugh. "Would you mind telling me how *did* you get up?"

"By the ladder," reply I, laconically, reddening, and, under the influence of that same insupportable doubt concerning my ankles, trying to tuck away my legs under me, a manœuvre which all but succeeds in toppling me over.

"The *ladder!*" (looking round). "Are

you quite sure? Then where has it disappeared to?"

"I said something that vexed Bobby," reply I, driven to the humiliating explanation, "and he went off with it. Never mind! once I am down, I will be even with him!"

He looks entertained.

"What will you do? What will you say? Will you make use of the same excellently terse expression that you applied to me last night?"

"I should not wonder," reply I, bursting out into uncomfortable laughter; "but it is no use talking of what I shall do when I am down: I am not down yet; I wish I were."

"It is no great distance from the ground," he says, coming nearer the wall, standing close to where the apricot is showering down her white and pinky petals. "Are you afraid to jump? Surely not! Try! If you will, I will promise that you shall come to no hurt."

"But supposing that I knock you down?" say I, doubtfully. "I really am a good weight—heavier than you would think to look at me—and, coming from such a height, I shall come with great force."

He smiles.

"I am willing to risk it; if you do knock me down, I can but get up again."

I require no warmer invitation. With arms extended, like the sails of a windmill, I hurl myself into the embrace of Sir Roger Tempest. The next moment I am standing beside him on the gravel-walk, red and breathless, but safe.

"I hope I did not hurt you much," I say with concern, turning toward him to make my acknowledgments, "but I really am very much obliged to you; I believe that, if you had not come by, I should have been left there till bedtime."

"It must have been a very unpleasant speech that you made to deserve so severe a punishment," he says, looking back at me, with a kindly and amused curiosity.

I do not gratify his inquisitiveness.

"It was something not quite polite," I answer, shortly.

We walk on in silence, side by side. My temper is ruffled. I am planning five distinct and lengthy vengeances against Bobby.

"I dare say," says my companion presently, "that you are wondering what brought me in here now—what attraction a kitchen-garden could have for me, at a time of year when not the most sanguine mind could expect to find any thing good to eat in it."

"At least, it is sheltered," I answer, shivering, thrusting my hands a little farther into the warm depths of my muff.

"I was thinking of old days," he says, with a hazy, wistful smile. "Ah! you have not come to the time of life for doing that yet. Do you know, I have not been here since your father and I were lads of eleven and twelve together?"

"*You* were eleven, and *he* was twelve, I am sure," say I emphatically.

"Why?"

"You look *so much* younger than he," I answer, looking frankly and unembarrassedly up into his face.

"Do I?" (with a pleased smile). "It is clear, then, that one cannot judge of one's self; on the rare occasions when I look in the glass it seems to me that, in the course of the last five years, I have grown into a *very* old fogy."

"He looks as if he had been so much oftener vexed, and so much seldomer pleased than you do," continue I, mentally comparing the smooth though weather-beaten benignity of the straight-cut features beside me, with the austere and frown-puckered gravity of my father's.

"Does he?" he answers, with an air of half-surprised interest, as if the subject had never struck him in that light before. "Poor fellow! I am sorry if it is so. Ah, you see"—with a smile—"he has *six* more reasons for wrinkles than I have."

"You mean us, I suppose," I answer matter-of-factly. "As to that, I think he draws quite as many wrinkles on our faces as we do on his." Then, rather ashamed of my over-candor, I add, with hurried bluntness, "You have never been married, I suppose?"

He half turns away his head.

"No—not yet! I have not yet had that good fortune."

I am inwardly amused at the power of his denial. Surely, surely he might say in the words of Lancelot:

"Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine."

"And you?" he asks, turning with an accent of playfulness toward me.

"Not yet," I answer, laughing, "and most likely I shall have to answer 'not yet' to that question, as often as it is put to me, till the end of the chapter."

"Why so?"

I shrug my shoulders.

"In moments of depression it strikes Barbara and me, that we and Tou Tou shall end by being three old cats together."

"Are you so anxious to be married?" he asks with an air of wonder, "in such a hurry to leave so happy a home?"

"Every one knows best where his own shoe pinches," I answer vernacularly. "I am afraid that it does not sound very lady-like, but, since you ask me the question, I *am* rather anxious. Barbara is not: *I* am."

A shade of I cannot exactly say what emotion—it *looks* like disappointment, but surely it cannot be that—passes across the sunshine of his face.

"All my plans hinge on my marrying," I continue, feeling drawn, I do not know how or why, into confidential communication to this almost total stranger, "and, what is more, on my marrying a rich man."

"And what are your plans?" he asks, with an air of benevolent interest, but that unexplained shade is still there.

"Their name is Legion," I answer; "you will be very tired before I get to the end of them."

"Try me."

"Firstly then," say I, narratively, "my husband must have a great deal of interest in several professions—the army, the navy, the bar—so as to give the boys a helping hand; then he must have some shooting—good shooting for them; for them all, that is, except Bobby! *never* shall *he* fire a gun in my preserves!"

My mind again wanders away to my vengeances, and I break off.

"Well!"

"He must also keep two or three horses for them to hunt: Algy *loves* hunting, but he hardly ever gets a day. He is so big, poor dear old boy, that nobody ever gives him a mount—"

"Yes?"

"Well, then, I should like to be able to have some nice parties—dancing and theatricals, and that sort of thing, for Barbara—father will never hardly let us have a soul here—and to buy some pretty dresses to set off her beauty—"

"Yes?"

"And then I should like to have a nice, large, cheerful house, where mother could come and stay with me, for two or three months at a time, and get *clear* away from the worries of house-keeping and—" the tyranny of father, I am about to add, but pull myself up with a jerk, and substitute lamely and stammeringly "and—and—others."

"Any thing else?"

"I should not at all mind a donkey-carriage for Tou Tou, but I shall not *insist* upon that."

He is smiling broadly now. The shade has fled away, and only sunshine remains.

"And what for yourself? you seem to have forgotten yourself!"

"For myself!" I echo, in surprise, "I have been telling you—you cannot have been listening—all these things are for myself."

Again he has turned his face half away.

"I hope you will get your wish," he says shortly and yet heartily.

I laugh. "That is so probable, is not it? I am so likely to fall in with a rich young man of weak intellect who is willing to marry the whole six of us, for that is what he would have to do, and so I should explain to him."

Sir Roger is looking at me again with an odd smile—not disagreeable in any way—not at all hold-cheap, or as if he were sneering at me for a simpleton, but merely *odd*.

"And you think," he says, "that when he hears what is expected of him he will withdraw?"

Again I laugh heartily and rather loudly, for the idea tickles me, and, in a large family, one gets into the habit of raising one's voice, else one is not heard.

"I am so sadly sure that he will never come forward, that I have never taken the trouble to speculate as to whether, if he did, my greediness would make him retire again."

No answer.

"Now that I come to think of it, though," continue I, after a pause, "I have no manner of doubt that he would."

Apparently Sir Roger is tired of the sub-

ject of my future prospects, for he drops it. We have left the kitchen-garden—have passed through the flower-garden—have reached the hall-door. I am irresolutely walking up the stone steps that mount to it, not being able to make up my mind as to whether or no I should make some sort of farewell observation to my companion, when his voice follows me. It seems to me to have a dissuasive inflection.

"Are you going in?"

"Well, yes," I answer uncertainly, "I suppose so."

He looks at his watch.

"It is quite early yet—not near luncheon-time—would it bore you very much to take a turn in the park? I think" (with a smile) "that you are quite honest enough to say so if it would: or, if you did not, I should read it on your face."

"Would you?" say I, a little piqued. "I do not think you would: I assure you that my face can tell stories, at a pinch, as well as its neighbor."

"Well, *would* it bore you?"

"Not at all! not at all!" reply I briskly, beginning to descend again; "but one thing is very certain, and that is that it will bore you."

"Why should it?"

"If I say what I was going to say you will think that it is on purpose to be contradicted," I answer, unlatching the gate in the fence, and entering the park.

"And if I do, much you will mind," he answers, smiling.

"Well, then," say I, candidly, looking down at my feet as they trip quickly along through the limp winter grass, "there is no use blinking the fact that I have no conversation—none of us have. We can gabble away among ourselves like a lot of young rooks, about all sorts of silly home jokes, that nobody but us would see any fun in; but when it comes to real talk—"

I pause expressively.

"I do not care for *real talk*," he says, looking amused; "I like *gabble* far, far better. I wish you would gabble a little now."

But the request naturally ties my tongue tight up.

"This is the tree that they planted when father was born," I say, presently, in a stiff, *cicerone* manner, pointing to a straight and strong young oak, which is lifting its branchy head, and the fine net-work of its brown twigs, to the cold, pale sky.

Sir Roger leans his arms on the top of the palings that surround the tree.

"Ah! eight-and-forty years ago! eight-and-forty years ago!" he repeats to himself with musing slowness. "Hard upon half a century!"

I turn over in my own mind whether I should do well to make some observation of a trite and copy-book nature on the much greater duration of trees than men, but, reflecting that the application of the remark may be painful to a person so elderly as the gentleman beside me, I abstain. However, he does something of the kind himself.

"To think that it should be such a stripling," he says, looking with a half-pensive smile at the straight young trunk, "hardly out of the petticoat age, and *we*—he and I—such a couple of old wrecks!"

It never occurs to me that it would be polite, and even natural, to contradict him. Why should not he call himself an old wreck, if it amuses him? I suppose he only means to express a gentleman decidedly in the decline of life, which, in my eyes, he is; so I say kindly and acquiescingly—

"Yes, it *is* rather hard, is it not?"

"Forty-one — forty-two — yes, forty-two years since I first saw him," he continues, reflectively, "running about in short, stiff, white petticoats and bare legs, and going bawling to his mother, because he tumbled up those steps to the hall-door, and cut his nose open."

I lift my face out of my muff, in which, for the sake of warmth, I have been hiding it, and, opening my mouth, give vent to a hearty and undutiful roar of laughter.

"Cut his nose open!" repeat I, indistinctly. "How pleased he must have been, and what sort of a nose was it? already hooked? It never *could* have been the conventional button, *that* I am sure of; *yours* was, I dare say, but *his—never*. Good Heavens!" (with a sudden change of tone, and disappearance of mirth) "here he is! Come to look for you, no doubt! I—I—think I may go now, may not I?"

"Go!" repeats he, looking at me with unfeigned wonder. "Why? It is more likely *you* that he has missed, *you*, who are no doubt his daily companion."

"Not quite daily," I answer, with a fine shade of irony, which, by reason of his small acquaintance with me, is lost on my friend. "Two, you know, is company, and three none. Yes, if you do not mind, I think it must be getting near luncheon-time. I will go."

So I disappear through the dry, knotted tussocks of the park grass.

CHAPTER IV.

"FRIENDS, Romans, and countrymen!" say I, on that same afternoon, strutting into the school-room, with my left hand thrust oratorically into the breast of my frock, and my right loftily waving, "I wish to collect your suffrages on a certain subject. Tell me," sitting down on a hard chair, and suddenly declining into a familiar and colloquial tone, "have you seen any signs of derangement in father lately?"

"None more than usual," answers Algy, sarcastically, lifting his pretty, disdainful nose out of his novel. "If, as the Eton Latin Grammar says, *ira* is a *brevis furor*, you will agree with me that he is pretty often out of his mind, in fact, a good deal oftener than he is in it."

"No, but *really?*"

"Of course not. What do you mean?"

"Put down all your books!" say I, impressively. "Listen attentively. Bobby, stop see-sawing that chair, it makes me feel deadly sick. Ah! my young friend, *you* will rue the day when you kept me sitting on the top of that wall—"

I break off.

"Go on! go on!" in five different voices of impatience.

"Well, then, father has sent a message by mother to the effect that *I* am to dine with them to-night—*I*, if you please—*I!*—you must own" (lengthening my neck as I speak, and throwing up my untidy flax head) "that sweet Nancies are looking up in the world."

A silence of stupefaction falls on the assembly. After a pause—

"YOU?"

"Yes, *I!*"

"And how do you account for it?"

"I believe," reply I, simpering, "that our future benefac—, no! I really must give up calling him that, or I shall come out with it to his face, as Bobby did last night. Well, then, Sir Roger asked me why I did not appear yesterday. I suppose he thought that I looked so *very* grown up, that they must be keeping me in pinafores by force."

Algy has risen. He is coming toward me. He has pulled me off my chair. He has taken me by the shoulders, and is turning me round to face the others.

"Allow me," he says, bowing, and making me bow, too, "to introduce you to the future legatee!—Barbara, my child, you and I are *nowhere*. This depraved old man has clearly no feeling for symmetry of form or face; a long career of Begums has utterly vitiated his taste. To-morrow he will probably be clamoring for Tou Tou's company."

"Brat!" says Barbara, laughing, "where has the analogy between me and the man who pulled up the window in the train for the old woman gone to?"

"Mother said I was to look as nice as I could," say I, casting a rueful glance at the tea-board, at the large plum loaf, at the preparations for temperate conviviality. I have sat down on the threadbare blue-and-red hearth-rug, and am shading my face with a pair of cold pink hands, from the clear, quick blaze. "What *am* I to wear?" I say, gloomily. "None of my frocks are ironed, and there is no time now. I shall look as if I came out of a dirty clothes-basket! Barbara, dear, will you lend me your blue sash? Last time I wore mine the Brat upset the gum-bottle over my ends."

"Let us each have the melancholy pleasure of contributing something toward the decking of our victim," says Algy, with a grin; "have my mess-jacket!"

"Have as many beads as you can about you," puts in Bobby. "Begums always have plenty of beads."

A little pause, while the shifting flame-light makes small pictures of us on the deep-bodied teapot's sides, and throws shadowy profiles of us on the wall.

"Mother said, too, that I was to try and not say any of my unlucky things!" I remark, presently.

"Do not tell him," says Bobby, ill-natured-

ly, "as you told poor Captain Saunders the other day, that 'they always put the fool of the family into the army.'"

"I did not say so of myself," cry I, angrily. "I only told it him as a quotation."

"Abstain from quotations, then," retorts Bobby, dryly; "for you know in conversation one does not see the inverted commas."

"What *shall* I talk about?" say I, dropping my shielding hand into my lap, and letting the full fire-warmth blaze on eyes, nose, and cheeks. "Barbara, what *did* you talk about?"

"Whatever I talked about," replies Barbara, gayly, "they clearly were not successful topics, so I will not reveal what they were."

Barbara is standing by the tea-table, thin and willowy, a tea-caddy in one hand, and a spoon in the other, ladling tea into the deep-bodied pot—a spoonful for each person and one for the pot.

"I will draw you up a list of subjects to be avoided," says Algy, dragging his chair to the table, and pulling a pencil out of his waistcoat-pocket. "Here, Tou Tou, tear a leaf out of your copy-book—imprimis, *old age.*"

"You are wrong there," cry I, triumphantly, "*quite* wrong; he is rather fond of talking of his age, harps upon it a good deal. He said to-day that he was an *old wreck!*"

"Of course he meant you to contradict him!" says Bobby, cackling; "and, from the little I know of you, I am morally certain that you did not—*did* you, now?"

"Well, no!" reply I, rather crestfallen; "I certainly did not. I would, though, in a minute, if I had thought that he wanted it."

"I wish," says Barbara, shutting the caddy with a snap, "that Providence had willed to send the dear old fellow into the world twenty years later than it did. In that case I should not at all have minded trying to be a comfort to him."

"He must have been very good-looking, must not he?" say I, pensively, staring at the red fire-caverns. "Very—before his hair turned gray. I wonder what color it was?"

Visions of gold yellow, of sunshiny brown, of warm chestnut locks, travel in succession before my mind's eye, and try in turn to adjust themselves to the good and goodly weather-worn face and wide blue eyes of my new old friend.

"It is so nice and curly even now," I go on, "twice as curly as Algy's."

"Tongs," replies Algy, with short contempt, looking up from his list of prohibitions.

"*Very* good looking!" repeat I, dogmatically, entirely ignoring the last suggestion.

"Perhaps when this planet was young!" retorts he, with the superb impertinence of twenty.

"You talk as if he were eighty years old," cry I, with an unaccountably *personal* feeling of annoyance. "He is *only* forty-seven!"

"*Only* forty-seven!"

And they all laugh.

"Well, I must be going, I suppose," cry I, leisurely rising, stretching, sighing, and beginning to collect the various articles of my wardrobe, scattered over the furniture. "Good-by, dear teapot! good-by, dear plum loaf! *how* I wish I was going to stay with you! It really is ten minutes past dressing-time, and father is always so pleased when one keeps him waiting for his soup."

"He would not say any thing to you to-day if you *were* late," says Bobby, astutely. "You might tumble over his gouty foot, and he would smile! Are we not the most united family in Christendom—*when we have company?*"

After all, I need not have disquieted myself; I am in very good time. When I open the drawing-room door, and make my entrance in the borrowed splendor of Barbara's broad blue-sash tails, and the white virginity of my own muslin frock, I find that neither of my parents have as yet made their appearance. Sir Roger has the hearth-rug to himself; at least he only shares it with Vick, and she is asleep; sitting very upright, it is true, with her thin tail round her toes, like a cat's, her head and whole body swaying from side to side in indisputable slumber. At sight of the chaste and modest apparition that the opened door yields to his gaze, an exclamation of pleasure escapes him—at least it sounds like pleasure.

"Ah! this is all right! You are here to-night at all events; but, by-the-by, what became of you yesterday?"

"What always becomes of me?" reply I, bluntly, lifting my grave gray eyes to his face, and to the hair which sweeps thick and waved

above his broad brown forehead. (Tongs indeed!)

"I remember that you told me you had been *cooking*, but you cannot cook *every* night."

"Not quite," reply I, with a short smile, stretching my hands to the blaze.

"But do not you dine generally?"

"Never when I can possibly help it," I reply, with emphasis. And no sooner are the words out of my mouth than I see that I have already transgressed my mother's commands, and given vent to one of "my unlucky things." I stand silent and ashamed, reflecting that no after-tinkering will mend my unfortunate speech.

"And to-night you could not help it?" he asks, after a slight, hardly perceptible pause.

I look up to answer him. He is forty-seven years old. He is a general, and a sir, and has been in every known land; has killed big and little beasts, and known big and little people, and I am nineteen, and nobody, and have rarely been beyond our own park and parish, and my acquaintance is confined to half a dozen turnipy squires and their wives; and yet he is looking snubbed, and it is I that have snubbed him. Well, I cannot help it. Truth is truth; and so I answer, in a low voice:

"No, father said I was to."

"And you look upon it as a great penance?" he says, still with that half-disappointed accent.

"To be sure I do," reply I, briskly. "So does Barbara. Ask her if she does not. So would you, if you were I."

"And why?"

"Hush!" say I, hearing a certain heavy, well-known, slow footfall. "He is coming! I will tell you by-and-by—when we are by ourselves."

After all, how convenient an elderly man is! I could not have said that to any of the young squires!

His blue eyes are smiling in the fire-light, as, leaning one strong shoulder against the mantel-piece, he turns to face me more fully.

"And when are we likely to be by ourselves?"

"Oh, I do not know," reply I, indifferently. "Any time.

And then father enters, and I am dumb. Presently, dinner is announced, and we walk in; I on father's arm. He addresses me several times with great *bonhomie*, and I respond with nervous monosyllables. Father is always suavity itself to us, when we have guests; but, when one is not in the habit of being treated with affability, it is difficult to enter into the spirit of the joke. Several times I catch our guest's frank eyes, watching me with inquiring wonder, as I respond with brief and low-voiced hurry to some of my parent's friendly and fatherly queries as to the disposition of my day. And I sit tongue-tied and hungry—for, thank God, I have always had a large appetite—dumb as the butler and footman—dumb as the racing-cups on the sideboard—dumber than Vick, who, being a privileged person, is standing—very tall—on her hind-legs, and pawing Sir Roger's coat-sleeve, with a small, impatient whine.

"Why, Nancy, child!" says father, helping himself to sweetbread, and smiling, "what made you in such a hurry to get away this morning out of the park?"

(Why can't he always speak in that voice? always smile?—even his nose looks a different shape.)

"Near—luncheon-time" reply I, indistinctly, with my head bent so low that my nose nearly touches the little square of bare neck that my muslin frock leaves exposed.

"Not a bit of it—half an hour off.—Why, Roger, I am afraid you have not been making yourself agreeable!—eh, Nancy?"

"No," say I, mumbling, "that is—yes—quite so."

"I was *very* agreeable, as it happened—rather more brilliant than usual, if possible, was not I? And, to clear my character, and prove that you thought so, you will take me out for another walk, some day, will not you?"

At the sound of his voice, so evidently addressing me, I look up—look at him.

"Yes! with pleasure! when you like!" I answer, heartily, and I neither mumble nor stutter, nor do I feel any disposition to drop my eyes. I *like* to look at him. For the rest of dinner I am absolutely mute. I make only one other remark, and that is a request to one of the footmen to give me some water. The evening passes. It is but a short one—at least, as regards the company of the gentlemen, for they sit late; father's port, I

am told, not being to be lightly left for any female frippery. I retire to the school-room, and regale my brethren with lively representations of father's unexampled benignity. I also resume with Algy the argument about *tongs*, at the very point where I had dropped it. It lasts till prayer-time; and its monotony is relieved by personalities. The devil in the boys is fairly quiescent to-night, and our evening devotions pass over with tolerable peace; the only *contretemps* being that the Brat, having fallen asleep, remains on his knees when "Amen" raises the rest of the company from theirs, and has to be privily and heavily kicked to save him from discovery and ruin. Having administered the regulation embrace to father, and heartily kissed mother—not but what I shall see her again; she always comes, as she came when we were little, to kiss us in bed—I turn to find Sir Roger holding open the swing-door for us.

"Are you quite sure about it to-night?" I say, stretching out my hand to him to bid him good-night. "*Ours* on the right—*yours* on the left—do you see?"

"*Yours* on the right—*mine* on the left," he repeats. "Yes—I see—I shall make no more mistakes—unless I make one on purpose."

"Do not come without telling us beforehand!" I cry, earnestly. "I mean *really:* if you hold a vague threat of paying us a visit over our heads, you will keep us in a state of unnatural tidiness for days."

I make a move toward retiring, but he still has hold of my hand.

"And about our walk?"

The others—boys and girls—have passed us: the servants have melted out of sight; so has mother; father is speaking to the butler in the passage—we are alone.

"Yes? what about it?" I ask, my eyes calmly resting on his.

"You will not forget it?"

"Not I!" reply I, lightly. "I want to hear the end of the anecdote about father's nose! I cannot get over the idea of him in a stiff, white petticoat: I thought of it at dinner, whenever I looked at him!"

At the mention of father, his face falls a little.

"Nancy," he says, abruptly, taking possession of my other hand also, "why did you answer your father so shortly, to-day? Why did you look so scared when he tried to joke with you?"

"Ah, why?" reply I, laughing awkwardly.

"You are not *afraid* of him, surely?"

"Oh, no—not at all!"

"Why do you speak in that sneering voice? It is not your own voice; I have known you only twenty-four hours, and yet I can tell that."

"I will not answer any more questions," reply I, recovering both hands with a sudden snatch; "and, if you ask me any more, I will not take you out walking! there!"

So I make off, laughing.

CHAPTER V.

"A PECK of March dust is worth a king's ransom," say I slowly next morning, as I stand by the window, trying to see clearly through the dimmed and tearful pane. "The king would have to do without his ransom to-day."

It is raining *mightily:* strong, straight, earnest rain, that harshly lashes the meek earth, that sends angry runlets down the gravel walks, that muddies the gold goblets of the closed crocuses.

"And you without your walk!" says Barbara, lifting her face from her stitching. "Poor Miss Nancy!"

"There is not enough blue sky to make a cat a pair of breeches!" cries Bobby, despondently, and with his usual vulgarity.

Sometimes I am tempted to fear that Bobby is hopelessly ungenteel—ungenteel for life. He has taken possession of another window, and is consulting the eastern sky.

"A ransomless king, and a trouserless cat! That is about the state of the case!" say I, turning, away from the window with a grin.

After all, now I come to think of it, I am nearly as vulgar as Bobby. But I am right. Through the day, through the long, light, cold evening, the posture of the weather changes not. To-day, Barbara, Algy, and I, are all constrained to dine; for have not we a dinner-party, or rather a mild simulation of one?—a squire or two, a squiress or two, a curate or two—such odd-come-shorts as can be got to-

gether in a scattered country neighborhood at briefest notice. Barbara and I, as it happens, are both late. It is five minutes past eight, when, with the minor details of our toilets a good deal slurred, with a paucity of bracelets and lack of necessary pins, we hurriedly and sneakingly enter the drawing-room, and find all our guests already come together. Mother gives us an almost imperceptible glance of gentle reproach, but father is so occupied in bantering a strange miss—banter in which the gallant and the fatherly happily join to make that manner which is the envy and admiration of the neighborhood—that he seems unconscious of our entrance. An intuition, however, tells us that this is not the case, but that he is making a note of it. This depresses us so much that, until song and sherry have comforted and emboldened us, we have not spirits to make any effort toward the entertainment of our neighbors. We have been paired with a couple of curates. Mine is a strong-handed, ingenuous Ishmael, who tells everybody that he hates his trade, and that he thinks it is very hard that he may not get out of it, now that his elder brother is dead. I am thankful to say that his appetite is as vast as his shoulders; so, after I have told him that I *love* raw oysters, and that Barbara cannot sit in the room with a roast hare; and have heard in return that he does not care about brill, but worships John Dory, we slide into a gluttonous silence, and abide in it. Barbara's man of God is in a wholly different pattern to mine. He is a macerated little saint, with the eyes of a ferret and the heart of a mouse. As the courses pass by, in savory order, I myself unemployed, watch my sister gradually reassuring, comforting, heartening him, as is her way with all weakly, maimed, and unhandsome creatures. She has succeeded in thawing him into a thin trickle of parochial talk, when mother bends her laced and feathered head in distant signal from the table-top, and off we go. We drink coffee, we drink tea, we pick clever little holes in our absent neighbors, in brisk duet and tortuous solo we hammer the blameless spinnet, we sing affecting songs about "fair doves," and "cleansing fires," and people "far away," and still our deliverers come not. They *must* hear our appealing melodies clearly through the walls and doors, but still they come not. Sunk in sloth and old port, still they come not. I seem to have said every possible thing that is to be said on every known subject to the young woman beside me, and now I am falling asleep. I feel it. Lulled by the warm glow diffused through the room, by the smell of the jonquils, lilies of the valley and daphnes, by the low even talk, I am slipping into slumber. The door opens, and I jump into wakefulness; Sir Roger to the rescue. I am afraid that I look at him with something not unlike invitation in my eyes, for he makes straight toward me.

"Wish me good-morning," say I, rubbing my eyes, "for I have been sweetly asleep. I fell asleep, wondering which of you would come first—somehow I thought it would be you. Are you going to sit here? Oh! that is all right!" as he subsides into the next division of the ottoman to mine. "What have you been talking about?" I continue, with a contented, chatty feeling, leaning my elbow on the blue-satin ottoman-top; "any thing pleasant? Did not you hear our screams for help through the wall?"

"Have we not come in answer to them?"

Yes; they are all here now, at last; all, from father down to the curates; some sitting resolutely down, some standing uncertainly up. Barbara's *protégé*, with frightened stealth, is edging round the furniture to where she sits on a little chair alone. Barbara is locketless, braceletless, chainless, head-dressless! such was our unparalleled haste to abscond. Ornaments has she none but those that God has given her: a sweep of blond hair, a long, cool throat, and two smooth arms that lie bare and white as any milk on her lap. As he nervously draws near, she lifts her eyes with a lovely friendliness to his face. He is poor, slightly thought of, sickly, not over-clever; probably she will talk to him all the evening.

"Look at Barbara!" say I, with deep admiration, familiarly laying my hand on Sir Roger's coat-sleeve, to make sure of engaging his attention, "that is always her way! Did you ever see any thing so cruelly shy as that poor little man is? See! he is wriggling all over like an eel! He came to call the other day, and while he was talking to mother I watched him. He tore a pair of quite new tea-green gloves into thin strips, like little thongs! He must find it rather expensive work, if he makes many morning calls, must not he?"

"Rather!"

"I am sure that you and Barbara would get on," continue I, loquaciously, leaning my head on my hand, and talking in that low, comfortable voice that our proximity warrants; "I cannot understand how it was that you did not make great friends that first night! I suppose that you are not poor and ugly and depressed enough for her to make much of you! Shall I make a sign to her to come over and talk to us?"

Sir Roger does not accept my proposal with the alacrity I had expected.

"Do not you think that she looks very comfortable where she is?" he asks, rather doubtfully.

I am a little disappointed.

"I am sure she would like you," I say, with a dogmatic shake of the head. "I told her that you were—well, that *I* got on with you, and we always like the same people."

"That must be awkward sometimes?"

"What do you mean? Oh! not in *that* way—" (with an unblushing, heart-whole laugh). "Lucky for me that we do not."

"Lucky for *you?*" (interrogatively).

"Why *will* you make me say things that sound mock-modest?" cry I, reddening a little this time. "You know perfectly well what I mean—it is not likely that any one would *look* at me when Barbara was by—you can have no notion," continue I, speaking very fast to avoid contradiction, "how well she looks when she is dancing—never gets hot, or flushed, or *mottled*, as so many people do."

"And *you?* how do *you* look?"

"I grow purple," I answer, laughing—"a rich imperial purple, all over. If you had once seen me, you would never forget me."

"Go on: tell me something more about Barbara!"

He has settled himself with an air of extreme repose and enjoyment. We really *are* very comfortable.

"Well," say I, nothing loath, for I have always dearly loved the sound of my own voice, "do you see that man on the hearth-rug?—do not look at him this very minute, or he will know that we are speaking of him. I cannot imagine why father has asked him here to-night—he wants to marry Barbara; he has never said it, but I know he does: the boys—we all, indeed—call him *Toothless Jack!* he is not old *really*, I suppose—not more than fifty, that is; but for Barbara!—"

I think that Sir Roger is beginning to find me rather tiresome: evidently he is not listening: he has even turned away his head.

There is a movement among the guests, the first detachment are bidding good-night, the rest speedily do the like. Father follows his favorite miss into the hall, cloaks her with gallant care, and through the door I hear him playfully firing off parting jests at her as she drives away. Then he returns to the drawing-room. Sir Roger has gone to put on his smoking-coat, I suppose. Father is alone with his wife and his two lovely daughters. We make a faint movement toward effacing ourselves, but our steps are speedily checked.

"Barbara! Nancy!"

"Yes, father" (in a couple of very small voices).

"May I ask you what induced you to keep my guests waiting half an hour for their dinner to-night?"

No manner of answer. *How* hooked his nose looks! how fearfully like a hawk he has grown all in a minute!

"When you have houses of your own," he continues with iced politeness, "you may of course treat your visitors to what vagaries you please, but, as long as you deign to honor *my* roof with your presence, you will be good enough to behave to my guests with decent civility, do you hear?"

"Well, Roger, how is the glass? up or down? What is it doing? Are we to have a fine day to-morrow?"

For Roger apparently has got quickly into his smoking-coat: at least he is here; he has heard all. Barbara and I *crawl* away with no more spring or backbone in us than a couple of torpid, wintry flies.

Five minutes later, "Do you wonder that we hate him?" cry I, with flaming cheeks, holding a japanned candlestick in one hand, and Sir Roger's right hand in the other. "I do not care if he *does* hear me!—yes, I do, though" (giving a great jump as a door bangs close to me).

Sir Roger is looking down at me with an expression of most thorough discomfiture and silent pain in his face.

"He did not mean it, Nancy!" he says,

hesitatingly, and with a sort of look of shamed wonder in his friendly eyes.

"*Did* not he?" (ironically).

A little pause, the position of the japanned candlestick and of Sir Roger's hand still remaining the same. "*How* I wish that *you* were my father instead!" I say with a sort of sob. He does not, as I fully expect, say, "So do I!" and I go to bed, feeling rather small, as one who has *gushed*, and whose gush has not been welcome to the recipient.

CHAPTER VI.

A FORTNIGHT has passed. Two Sundays, two Mondays, two Tuesdays, etc. Fourteen times have I sleepily laid head on pillow. Fourteen times have I yawningly raised it from my pillow. Fourteen times have I hungrily eaten my dinner, since the night when I stood in the hall with Sir Roger's hand in mine, raging against my parent. And Sir Roger is here still. After all, there is nothing like the tenacity of boyish friendship, is there?

I suppose that, to Sir Roger, father is still the manly, debonair youth that he remembers thirty years ago. In happy ignorance he slurs over the thirty intervening years of moroseness, and goes back to that blest epoch in which I have so much difficulty in believing, and about which he, walking beside me now and again through the tender, springing grass of the meadows, has told me many a tale. For our promised walk has come off, and so have many others like it.

He *must* be dotingly fond of father. It is the 15th of April. I dare say, O reader, that it seems to you much like any other date, but to me, through every back-coming year, it seems to gain fresh significance—the date that marks the most important day—take it for all in all—of my life, though, whether for good or ill, who shall say, until I am dead, and my life's sum reckoned up. I awake on that morning with no forecast of what is coming! I tear myself from my morning dreams with as sleepy unwillingness as usual. I eat my bread-and-butter with as stolidly a healthy an appetite. I run with as scampering feet, as evenly-beating a heart as is my wont, with little Vick along the garden-walks, in the royal morning sun. For one of God's own days has come—one that must have lost his way, and strayed from paradise.

It has the steady heat of June, though we are only in mid-April, and the freshness of the prune. The leaves on the trees are but tender and tiny, and through them the sun sends his might. The tulips are all ablaze and a-stare, making one blink with the dazzle of their odorless beauty: the frolicsome young wind is shaking out their balm from hyacinth-bells, and the sweet Nancies—my flowers—blowing all together, are swaying and *congéeing* to the morning airs.

O wise men, who know all things, do you know this? Can you tell it me? Where does the flower hide her scent? From what full cup of hidden sweets does one suck it!

It is one of those days when one feels most convinced of being immortal—when the spirits of men stretch out longing arms toward the All-Good, the Altogether Beautiful—when souls thirst for God, yearn most deeply for the well of his unfathomed truth—when, to those who have lost, their dead come back in most pleasant, gentle guise. As for me, I have lost nothing and no one as yet. All my treasures are still about me; I can stretch out live hands, and touch *them* alive; none of my dear names are yet to be spoken sparingly with bated breath, as too holy for common talk. And yet I, too, as I walk and bask, and bend to smell the hyacinth-blooms, feel that same vague and most unnamed yearning—a delicate pain that he who has it would barter for no boisterous joy. The clocks tick out the scented hours, and with loud singing of happy birds, with pomp of flowers and bees, and freaked butterflies, God's day treads royally past.

It is afternoon, and the morning wind, heaving with too much fragrance, has lain down to sleep. A great warm stillness is on the garden and house. The sweet Nancies no longer bow. They stand straight up, all a-row, making the whole place honeyed. The schoolroom is one great nosegay. Every vase and jug, and cup and pot, and pan and pipkin, that we can command, is crammed with heavy-headed daffodils, with pale-cheeked primroses, with wine-colored gilly-flowers, every thing

that spring has thrust most plentifully into our eager hands.

The boys have been out fishing.

Algy and Bobby have been humorously trying to drown the Brat.

He looks small and cold in consequence, and his little pert nose is tinged with a chilly pink. Half an hour ago, mother called me away to a private conference, exciting thereby a mighty curiosity not unmixed with envy in my brethren.

Our colloquy is ended now, and I am re-entering the school-room.

"Well, what was it? out with it," cries Algy, almost before I am inside the door again. Algy is sitting more than half—more than three-quarters out of the window, balancing himself with great nicety on the sill. He is in the elegant *négligé* of a decrepit shooting-jacket, no waiscoat, and no collar.

"What have you been doing to your face?" says Bobby, drawing nigh, and peering with artless interest into the details of my appearance; "it is the color of this" (pointing to a branch of red rhibes, which is hanging its drooped flowers, and joining its potent spice to the other flower-scents).

"Is it?" I answer, putting both hands to my cheeks, to feel their temperature. "I dare say! so would yours be, perhaps, if you had, like me, been having a—" I stop suddenly.

"Having a *what?*"

"I will not say what I was going to say," I cry, emphatically, "it was nonsensical!"

"But what *has* she told you, Nancy?" asks Barbara, who, enervated by the first hot day, is languishing in the rocking-chair, slowly seesawing. "What could it have been that she might not as well have said before us all?"

"You had better try and guess," I reply, darkly.

"I will not, for one," says Bobby, doggedly; "I never made out a conundrum in my life, except, 'What is most like a hen stealing?'"

"It is not much like that," say I, demurely, "and, in fact, when one comes to think of it, it can hardly be called a conundrum at all!"

"I do not believe it is any thing worth hearing," remarks the Brat, skeptically, "or you would have come out with it long ago! you never could have kept in to yourself!"

"Not worth hearing!" cry I, triumphantly raising my voice, "is not it? That is all *you* know about it!"

"Do not wrangle, children," says Algy from the window; "but, Nancy, if you have not told us before the clock gets to the quarter" (looking impressively at the slowly-traveling hands), "I shall think it right to—"

What awful threats would have followed will never now be certainly known, for I interrupt.

"I *will* tell you! I *mean* to tell you!" I cry, excitedly, covering my face with my hands, and turning my back to them all; "only do not *look* at me! look the other way, or I *cannot* tell you."

A little pause.

"You have only three minutes, Nancy."

"Will you *promise*," cry I, with indistinct emphasis from under my hands, "none of you to *laugh*—none, even Bobby?"

"Yes!"—"Yes!"—"Yes!"

"Will you *swear?*"

"What is the use of swearing?—you have only half a minute now. Well, I dare say it is nothing very funny. Yes, we will swear!"

"Well, then, Sir Roger—I *hear* Bobby laughing!"

"He is not!"—"He is not!"—"I am not—I am only beginning to sneeze!"

"Well, then, Sir Roger—"

I come to a dead stop.

"*Sir Roger?* What about him? There is not a smile on one of our faces: if you do not believe, look for yourself!—What about our future benefactor?"

"He *is* not our future benefactor," cry I, energetically, whisking swiftly round to face them again, and dropping my hands, "he *never* will be!—he does not *want* to be! He wants to—to—to—MARRY ME! there!"

The murder is out. The match is set to the gunpowder train. Now for the explosion!

The clock-hand reaches the quarter—passes it; but in all the assembly there is no sound. The westering sun shines in on four open mouths (the youthful Tou Tou is absent), on four pairs of stupidly-staring eyes. The rocking-chair has ceased rocking. Bobby's sneeze has stopped half-way. There is a petrified silence.

At length, "*Marry you!*" says the Brat,

in a deeply-accented tone of low and awed disbelief. "Why, he was at school with father!"

"I wish to heavens that he had never been at school anywhere!" cry I, in a fury. "I am sick to death of hearing that he was at school with father. Will no one ever forget it?"

"He is forty-seven!" says Algy, at last closing his mouth, and speaking with slow impressiveness. "Nineteen from forty-seven! how many years older than you?"

"Do not count!" cry I, pettishly; "what is the use? not all the counting in the world will make him any younger."

"It is not true!" cries Bobby, with boisterous skepticism, jumping up from his seat, and making a plunge at me; "it is a *hoax!* she has been taking us all in!—Really, Nancy, for a beginner, you did not do it badly!"

"It is *not* a hoax!" cry I, scornfully, standing scarlet and deeply ashamed, facing them all; "it is real, plain, downright, simple truth."

Another pause. No sound but the monotonous, unemotional clock, and the woodpecker's fluty laugh from the orchard.

"And so you *really* have a lover at last, Nancy?" says Algy, the corners of his mouth beginning to twitch in a way which looks badly for the keeping of his oath.

"Yes!" say I, beginning to laugh violently, but quite uncomfortably; "are you surprised? you know I always told you that if you half shut your eyes, and looked at me from a great way off, I really was not so bad-looking."

"You have distanced the Begums!" cries the young fellow, joining in my mirth, but with a good deal more enjoyment than I can boast.

"So I have!" I answer; and my sense of the ludicrous overcoming all other considerations, I begin to giggle with a good-will.

"Let us look at you, Nancy!" says the Brat, taking hold of me by both arms, and bringing the minute impertinence of his face into close neighborhood to mine. "I begin to think that there must be more in you than we have yet discovered! we never looked upon you as one of our most favorable specimens, did we?"

"Do not you remember old Aunt Williams?" reply I, merrily; "how she used to say 'I was not pretty, my dears, but I was a pleasant little devil!' perhaps I am a pleasant little devil!"

"*Poor—dear*—old fellow!" says Barbara, in an accent of the profoundest, delicatest, womanliest pity, "*how* sorry I am for him! Nancy, how will you break it to him most kindly? I am afraid he will be sadly hurt! will you speak to him, or do it by letter?"

Barbara has risen. We are all standing up, more or less; it is impossible to sit through such news; Barbara's garden-hat is in her hand. The warm and mellow sun, that is making Africa's dreary expanse in the map on the wall one broad fine sheet, is enkindling, too, the silk of her hair, the flower-petals of her cheeks, the blue compassion of her eyes. My pretty, tall Barbara! Let them say what they like, I am sure that somewhere —*somewhere*—you are pretty now!"

"If you write," says Algy, still laughing, but with more moderation, "I should advise you to depute me to make a fair copy of the letter; else, from the extreme ambiguity of your handwriting, he will most likely mistake your drift, and imagine that you are saying yes."

"How do you know that I am not going to say yes?" I ask abruptly.

Rivers of additional scarlet are racing to my cheeks, over my forehead—in among the roots of my hair—all around and about my throat, but I stand, looking the assembled multitude full in the face, fairly, well, and boldly.

"Listen!" I continue, holding up my right hand in deprecation, "let me speak!—do not interrupt me! Bobby, I know that he was at school with father—Algy, I know that he is forty-seven—all of you, I know that his hair is gray, and that there are crows'-feet about his eyes—but still—but still—"

"Do you mean to say that you are *in love* with him?" breaks in Bobby, impressively.

Instances of enamored humanity have been rare in Bobby's experience. With the exception of Toothless Jack, he has never had a near and familiar view of an authentic specimen. I therefore see him now regarding me with a reverent interest, not unmixed with awe.

"I mean nothing so silly!" I answer, with lofty petulance. "I am a great deal too old for any such nonsense!"

"There I go with you," says Algy, not without grandeur. "I believe that it is the greatest humbug out, and that it rarely occurs between the ages of sixteen and sixty."

"Father's and mother's was a love-match," says Bobby, gravely. "Did not Aunt Williams tell us that they used always to sit hand-in-hand before they were married?"

A shout of laughter at our parents' expense greets this piece of information.

"*All* married people grow to hate one another after a bit," say I, comprehensively; "it is only a question of time."

"But if you do not love him *now*, and if you are sure that you will hate him by-and-by," says Barbara, looking rather puzzled, "what makes you think of taking him?"

"It would be such a fine thing for all the family: I could give all the boys such a shove," say I, with homely shrewdness.

"They killed seven hundred head of game on his big day last year: I heard him tell father so," says Bobby, with his mouth watering.

"He has a moor in Scotland," throws in the Brat.

"He must ride a stone heavier than I do," says Algy, thoughtfully, "his horses would certainly carry me: I wonder would he give me a mount now and then?"

"I would have you *all* staying with me *always*," I cry, warming with my theme, and beginning to dance, "all except father: he should come once a year for a week, if he was good, and *not at all*, if he was not."

"What will you call him, Nancy?" asks the Brat, inquisitively. "What shall *we* call him?"

"He will be Tou Tou's *brother*," cries Bobby, with a yell of delight.

"Hush!" says Barbara, apprehensively, "he will hear you."

"No, he will not," I answer composedly. "A person would have to bawl even louder than Bobby does, to make him hear: he has gone away for a week; he said he did not wish me to decide in a hurry: he has given me till this day week; I wish it were this day ten years—"

"This day week, then," says Algy, walking about with his hands in his pockets, and smiling to himself, "we may hope to see him return in triumph in a blue frock-coat, with the ring and the parson; at that age one has no time to lose."

"Haste to the wedding!" cries the Brat at the top of his voice, seizing me by both hands, and forcing me to execute an uncouth war-dance, in unwilling celebration of my approaching nuptials.

"I hope that there will be lots of almonds in the cake!" says Bobby, gluttonously.

CHAPTER VII.

THE week's reprieve has ended; my Judgment Day has come. Never, never, surely, did seven days race so madly past, tumbling over each other's heels. Even Sunday—Sunday, which mostly contains at least forty-eight hours—has gone like a flash. Morning service, afternoon service, good looks, sermon to the servants, supper, they all run into one another like dissolving views. For the first time in my life, my sleep is broken. I fall asleep in a fever of irresolution. I awake in one. I walk about in one. I feed the jackdaw in one. I box Bobby's ears in one. My appetite (oh, portent!) flags. In intense excitement, who can eat yards of bread-and-butter, pounds of oatmeal-porridge, as has ever been my bucolic habit? Shall I marry Sir Roger, or shall I not? The birds, the crowing cocks, the church-bells, the gong for dinner, the old pony whinnying in the park, they all seem to say this It seems written on the sailing clouds, on the pages of every book that I open. Armies of *pros* wage battle against legions of *cons*, and every day the issue of the fight seems even more and more doubtful.

The morning of the day has arrived, and I am still undecided. I dress in a perfect storm of doubts and questionings. I put on my gown, without the faintest idea of whether it is inside out, or the reverse. I go slowly down-stairs, every banister marked by a fresh decision. I open the dining-room door. Father's voice is the first thing that I hear; father's voice, raised and rasping. He is standing up, and has a letter in his hand; from the engaging blue of its color, and the harmony of its shape, too evidently a bill.

"I regret to have to hurt your feelings," he is saying, in that awful civil voice, at which we

all—small and great—quake, "but the next time that *this* occurs" (pointing to the bill), "I must request you to find accommodation for yourself elsewhere, as really my poor house is not a fit place for a young gentleman with such princely views on the subject of expenditure."

The object of this pleasant harangue is Algy, who, also standing, with his face very white, his lips very much compressed, and his eyes flashing with a furious light, is fronting his parent on the hearth-rug.

Behind the tea-urn, mother is mingling her drink with tears, and making little covert signs to Algy, at all rates to hold his tongue.

My mind is made up, never to be unmade again. I will marry Sir Roger. He shall pay all Algy's debts, and forever dry mother's sad, wet eyes.

. . . . . .

The weather of paradise is gone back to paradise. This day is very earthly. There has been a sharp, cold shower, and there is still a strong rain-wind, which has snapped a score of tulip-heads. Poor, brave *Jour ne sols!* Prone they lie on the garden-beds, defiled, dispetaled. Even the survivors are stained and dashed, and the sweet Nancies look pinched and small. If you were to go down on your knees to them, they could not give you any scent. I am walking up and down the room, in a state of the utmost agitation. My heart is beating so as to make me feel quite sick. My fingers are very hot, but hardly so hot as my face.

"For Heaven's sake do not make me laugh! do not!" cry I, nervously; "it would be *too* dreadful if I were to receive his overtures with a broad grin, would not it? There! it is gone? Do I look quite grave?"

I take half a dozen hurried turns along the floor, and try to think of all our most depressing family themes—father; Algy's college-bills; Tou Tou's shrunk face and thin legs; nothing will do. When I stop before the glass and consult it, that hysterical smile is there still.

"Do you remember the day when we were children, that we all went to the dentist?" says the Brat, chuckling, "and father gave Bobby a New Testament because he had his eye-tooth out? Does to-day at all remind you of it, Nancy?"

"I had far rather have *both* my eye-teeth out, and several of my double ones, too," reply I, sincerely.

A little pause.

"I must not keep him any longer," cry I, desperately. "Tell me!" (appealing piteously to them all), "do I look all right? do I look pretty natural?"

"You do not look *middle-aged* enough," says Bobby, bluntly.

"Put on your bonnet," suggests Algy. "You look twenty years older in that, particularly when you cock it well over your nose, as you did last Sunday."

"You are all very unkind!" say I, in a whimpering voice, walking toward the door.

"And if he becomes too demonstrative," says the Brat, overtaking me with a rush before I reach it, "say:

'Unhand me, graybeard loon!'"

Then I go. As I know perfectly well that, if I give myself time to think, I shall stand with the drawing-room door-handle in my grasp for half an hour, before I can made up my mind to enter, I take the bull by the horns, and, whisking in suddenly and noisily, find myself *tête-à-tête* with my lover.

Certainly, I never felt such a fool in my life. How *awful* it will be if I burst out laughing in his face! It is quite as likely as not that I shall do it out of sheer hysterical fright. Oh, how different! how much nicer it was when we last parted! I had taken him to see the jackdaw, and the little bear that Bobby brought from foreign parts: and Jacky had bitten his finger so humorously, and we had been so merry, and I had told him again how much I wished that he could change places with father. And now! I *feel*—more than see—that he is drawing nigh me. Through my eyelids—for I am very sure that I never lift my eyes—I get an idea of his appearance.

Under his present aspect I am much more disposed to be critical, and to pick holes in him, than I was under his former one. Any attempt at youthfulness, any effort at *smartness*, will not escape my vigilant reprobation—down-eyed and red-cheeked as I appear to be. But none such do I find. There is no false juvenility—there is no trace of dandyism in the plain and quiet clothes, in the hair sparsely sprinkled with snow, in the mature and goodly face.

An iron-gray, middle-aged gentleman stands before me, more vigorous, more full of healthy life than two-thirds of the puny youth, nourished on sherry and bitters, of the present small generation, but with no wish, no smallest effort to take away one from the burden of years that God has laid on his strong shoulders.

There is no doubt that I shall not speak first, so for a moment there is a profound silence. Then I find my hot hand in Sir Roger's, where it has so often and so familiarly lain before, and I hear Sir Roger's voice addressing me.

"I am an old fool, Nancy, and you have come to tell me so?"

Somehow I know that the bronze of his face is a little paled by emotion, but there is no sawny sentiment in his tone, none of the lover's whine. It is the same voice—as manly, as sustained—that made comments on Bobby's little bear. And yet, for the moment, I am physically unable to answer him. Who *can* answer the simplest question ever put with a lump the size of a cocoa-nut in their throat? My eyelids are still hopelessly drooped over my eyes, but, by some sense that is not eyesight, I am aware that there is a sort of shyness in his face, a diffidence in his address.

"Nancy, have I come back too soon? am I hurrying you?"

I raise my eyes for an instant, and then let them fall.

"No, thank you," I say, demurely, "not at all. I have had plenty of time!"

And then, somehow, there seems to me something so ludicrous in the sound of my own speech, that I tremble on the verge of a burst of loud and unwilling laughter.

"Speak out all your thought to me, whatever it is," he says, in a tone of grave entreaty, moved and tender, yet manly withal. "Look at me with the same friendly, fearless eyes that you did last week! I know, my dear, that you always think of others more than yourself, and I dare say that *now* you are afraid of hurting me! Indeed, you need not be! I am tough and well-seasoned; I have known what pain is before now—it would be very odd, at my time of life, if I had not! I can well bear a little more, and be the better for it, perhaps."

I stand stupidly silent. One's outer man or woman often does an injustice to one's inner feelings. As he speaks, my heart goes out to him, but I can find no words in which to dress my thought.

"Nancy!" in a tone of thorough distress. "I can bear any thing but seeing you shrink and shiver away from me, as I have seen you do from your father."

"You *never* will see that," reply I, laconically, gathering bravery enough to look him in the face, as I deliver this encouraging remark.

"Do you think," he says, beginning to walk restlessly about the room—(long ago he dropped my limp hand)—"that all this week I have had much hope? Every time that I have caught a glimpse of myself in the glass, I have said, 'Is this a face likely to take a child's fancy? Do you bear much resemblance to the hero of her story-books?' My dear"—(stopping before me)—"you cannot think my presumption more absurd than I do myself."

"I do not think it at all absurd," reply I, beginning to speak quite stoutly, and to be rather diffuse than otherwise. "Perhaps I did, just at first, when they were all laughing, and saying about your having been at school with father; but *now* I do not in the least—I do not care what the boys say—I do not, really. I am not joking."

At my words he half stretches out his hand to take mine; but, as if repressing some strong impulse, withdraws it again, and speaks quietly, with a rather sober smile.

"I am afraid that one's soul ages more slowly than one's body, Nancy! Even at my age it has seemed difficult to me to be brought into hourly companionship with all that was most fresh and womanly, and spirited, and pretty."

"*Pretty!*" think I. "I wish the boys could hear him! they will never believe me if I tell them."

"And not wish to have it for my own, to take and make much of. I that have never had any thing very lovely or lovable in my life. And then, dear, it was all your good-nature, you did not know what you were doing; you seemed to find some little pleasure in my society—even chose it by preference now and then. My talk did not weary you, as I should

have thought it would have done, and so I grew to think—to think— Bah!" (with a movement of impatience) "it was a foolish thought! what can there be in common between me and a child like you?"

"I think that there is a great deal," reply I, speaking very steadily, and, so saying, I stretch out my hand and of my own accord put it in his again. He cannot well return it to me, so he keeps it.

"And yet it is impossible?" he says, with hesitating interrogation, while his steel-blue eyes look anxiously into mine.

"Is it?" say I, a wily smile beginning to creep over my features. "If it is, what was the use of asking me?" I have the grace to grow extremely red as I make this observation.

"Nancy!" seizing my other hand, too, and speaking in a hurried, low voice that slightly shakes with the force of his emotion, "what are you saying? You do not know what you are implying."

"Yes I do," reply I, firmly. "I know perfectly. And it is *not* impossible. Not at all, I should say."

Upon this explicit declaration an ordinary lover would have had me in his arms and smothered me with kisses before you could look round, but my lover is abnormal. He does nothing of the kind.

"Are you sure," he says, with an earnest gravity and imploring emphasis, "that you understand what you are doing? Are you certain, Nancy, that if we had not been friends, if you had not been loath to pain me, that you would not have answered differently? Think, child! think well of it! this is not a matter of months or even years, but of your whole long young life."

"Yes," say I, gravely, looking down. "I know it is."

And, put thus solemnly before me, the idea of the marriage state seems to me hardly less weightily oppressive than the idea of eternity.

"How should I feel," he continues (he has put a hand on each of my shoulders, and is looking at me with a serious yet tender fixity), "if, by-and-by, in the years ahead of us, you came and told me, that by my selfishness, taking advantage of your youth, I had destroyed your life?"

"And do you think," say I, with a flash of indignation, "that even if you had done it, I should come and tell you?"

"Are you *quite* sure that among all the men of your acquaintance, men nearer you in age, more akin in tastes, men *not* gray-haired, *not* weather-beaten, *not* past their best years—there is not one with whom you would more willingly spend your life than with me? If it is so, I *beseech* you to tell me, as you would tell your mother!"

"If there were," reply I, smiling broadly, a smile which greatly widens my mouth, and would show my dimples if I had any, "I should *indeed* be susceptible! The two curates that you saw the other night—the one who tore his gloves into strips, you know, and the other who ate so much—Toothless Jack—these are the sort of men among whom my lines have lain. Do you think I am likely to be very much in love with any of *them?*"

My speech does not seem so altogether reassuring as I had expected.

"I am very suspicious," he says, half apologetically, "but you have seen so little of the world, you have led such a nun's life! how can you answer for it that hereafter out in the world you may not meet some one more to your liking? You are a dear little, kindly, tender-hearted sort, and you do not tell me so, but you do not like me *much*, Nancy! Indeed, dear, I could far better do without you now, than see you by-and-by wishing me away and yet be unable to rid you of me."

"People can help falling in love," say I, with matter-of-fact common-sense. "If I belonged to you, of course I should never think of any one else in that way."

"Are you sure—?"

"I wish that you would not ask me any more questions," say I, interrupting him with a pout. "I am quite sure of every thing you can possibly think of."

"I will only ask you *one* more—are you quite sure that it is not for your brothers' and sisters' sakes—not your own—that you are doing this? Do you remember" (with a smile half playful, half sad) "what you told me about your views of marriage on that first day when I found you in the kitchen-garden?"

"I hope to Heaven that you did not think I was *hinting*," say I, growing crimson; "it

certainly sounded very like it, but I really and truly was not. I was thinking of a *young* man! I assure you" (speaking with great earnestness) "that I had as much idea of marrying you, as of marrying *father!*"

Looking back with mature reflection at this speech, I think that it may be safely reckoned among my unlucky things.

"No," he says, wincing a little, a very little. "I know you had not; but—you have not answered my question."

For a moment I look down irresolute; then, through some fixed belief in him, I look up and tell him the plain, bare truth.

"I *did* think that it would be a nice thing for the boys," I say, "and so it will, there is no doubt; you will be as good as a fa—, as a brother to them; but—I like you *myself* besides, you may believe it or not as you please, but it is quite, *quite*, QUITE true."

As I speak, the tears steal into my eyes.

"And *I* like *you!*" he answers very simply, and, so saying, stoops, and with a sort of diffidence kisses me.

. . . . . .

"Well, how did it go off?" cries Bobby, curiously, when I next rejoin my compeers. "Did you laugh?"

"*Laugh!*" I echo, with lofty anger, "I do not know what you mean! I never felt in the least inclined." Then, seeing my brethren look rather aghast at this sudden change in the wind, I add gayly: "Bobby, you must never again breathe a word about Sir Roger's having been at school with father; let it be supposed that he did without education."

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS is my wooing: thus I am disposed of. Without a shadow of previous flirtation with any man born of woman—without any of the ups and downs, the ins and outs of an ordinary love-affair, I place my fate in Sir Roger's hands. Henceforth I must have done with all girlish speculations, as to the manner of man who is to drop from the clouds to be my wooer. Well, I have not many day-dreams to relinquish. When I have built Spanish castles—in a large family, one has not time for many—a lover for myself has been less the theme of my aspirations than a benefactor for the family. One who will exercise a wholesomely repressive influence over father, has been more than any thing the theme of my longings; on the unlikely hypothesis of marrying at all. For, O friends, it has seemed to me *most* unlikely; I dare say that I might not have been over-difficult — might have thankfully and heartily loved some one not quite a Bayard, but one cannot love *any thing* —any odd and end—and, say what you will, the choice of a country-girl, with a little dowry and a plain face, is but small. For—do not dislike me for it if you can help—I *am* plain. I know it by the joint and honest testimony of all my brethren. I have had no trouble in gathering the truth from them. A hundred times they have volunteered it, with that healthy disregard of any sickly sensitiveness which arms one against blows to one's vanity through all after-life. Yes: I am plain; not offensively so, not largely, fatly, staringly plain, but in a small, blond, harmless way. However, Sir Roger thinks me pretty. Did not he say so, in unmistakable English? I have tried darkly to hint this to the boys, but have been so decisively pooh-poohed that I resolve not to allude to the subject again. Not only am I plain now, but I shall remain plain to my life's end. Unlike the generality of ugly heroines, you will not see me develop and effloresce into beauty toward the end of my story.

The interval between my betrothal and my marriage is but short. On April 22d, I put my hand into Sir Roger's. On May 20th, I am to put it into his for good. When the bridegroom is forty-seven, and the bride one of six, why should there be any delay? Why should a man keep and lodge his daughter any longer than he can help, when he has found some one else willing to do it for him? This, I think, is father's view. And, meanwhile, father himself is more like an *angel* than a man. Not once do we hear the terrible, polite voice that chills the marrow of our bones. Not once is his nose more than becomingly hooked. Not once does he look like a hawk. *Another* long bill comes in for Algy, and is dismissed with the benevolent comment that you cannot put gray heads upon green shoulders. I dine every day now; and father and I converse agreeably upon indifferent topics. Once—oh,

prodigious!—we take a walk round the Home Farm together, and he consults me about the Berkshire pigs. Then comes a mad rush for clothes. I am involved in a whirlwind of haberdashery, Brussels lace, diamonds. It feels very odd—the becoming possessed of a great number of stately garments, to which Barbara has no fellows—Barbara and I, who hitherto have been always stitch for stitch alike. And meanwhile I see next to nothing of my future husband. This is chiefly my own doing.

"You will not mind," I say, standing before him one day in the drawing-room window, and speaking rather bashfully—somehow I do not feel so comfortably easy and outspoken with him as I did before the catastrophe—"you will not mind if I do not see much of you—do not go out walking—do not talk to you very much till—till *it* is over!"

"And why am I not to mind?" he asks, half jestingly, and yet a little gravely, too.

"You will have quite enough—*too much* of me afterward," I say, with a shy laugh, "and *they*—they will never have much of me again—never so much, at least—and" (with rather a tremble in my voice) "we have had *such* fun together!"

And so Sir Roger keeps away. Whether his self-denial costs him much, I cannot say. It never occurs to me at the time that it does. He may think me a very nice little girl, and that I shall be a great comfort to him, but he cannot care much about having any very long conversations with me—he that has seen so many lands, and known so many great and clever people, and read so many books. He has always been *most* undemonstrative to me. At *his* age, no doubt, he does not care much for the foolish endearments of lovers; so, with an easy conscience, I devote myself, for my short space, to the boys, to Barbara, to Vick, and the jackdaw. Once, indeed—just once—I have a little talk with him, and afterward I almost wish that I had not had it. We are sitting under a horse-chestnut-tree in the garden—a tree that, under the handling of the warm air, is breaking into a thousand tender faces. We did not begin by being *tête-à-tête;* indeed, several lately-occupied chairs intervene between us, but first one and then another has slipped away, and we are alone.

"Nancy!" says Sir Roger, his eyes following the Brat, who is lightly tripping up the stone steps, looking very small and agile in his white-flannel cricketing things, "what is that boy's real name? Why do you call him 'the Brat?'"

"Because he *is* such a *Brat*," reply I, fondly, picking up from the grass a green chestnut-bud that the squirrels or the rooks have untimely nipped. "Did you ever see any thing so little, so white and pert? He has sadly mistaken his vocation in life: he ought to have been a street Arab."

"One gets rather sick of one's surname," says my companion. "Except your father, hardly any one calls me Roger now! I should be glad to answer to it again."

He turns and looks at me with a kind of appeal as he says this. If he were not forty-seven and a man, I should say that he was coloring a little. After all, blushing is confined to no age. I have seen a veteran of sixty-five redden violently.

"Do you mean to say," cry I, looking rather aghast, and speaking, as usual, without thinking, "that you mean *me* to call you *Roger!* indeed, I could not think of such a thing! it would sound so—so *disrespectful!* I should as soon think of calling my father *James*."

"Should you?" he answers, turning away his face toward the garden-beds, where the blue forget-me-not is unrolling her sky-colored sheet, and the double daisies are stiffly parading their tight pink buttons. "Then call me what you like!"

I am not learned in the variations of his voice, as I am in those of father and Algy, in either of which I can at once detect each fine inflection of anger, contest, or pain; but, comparatively unversed as I am in it, there sounds to me a slight, carefully smothered, yet still perceptible, intonation of disappointment—mortification. I wish that the air would give me back my words; but that it never yet was known to do.

"I will try if you like," say I, cheerfully, but a little shyly, as, like the March Hare and the Hatter in the "Mad Sea Party," I move up past the empty chairs to the one next him. "I do not see, after all, why I should not get quite used to it in time! Roger! Roger! it is a name I have always been very partial to until" (laughing a little) "the Claimant threw discredit on all Rogers!"

He is looking at me again. After all, I must have been mistaken. There is no shadow of disappointment or mortification near him. He is smiling with some friendliness.

"You must never mind what *I* say," I continue, dragging my wicker chair along the shortly-shorn sward a little nearer to him. "*Never!* nobody ever does; I am a proverb and a by-word for my malapropos speeches. Mother always *trembles* when she hears me talking to a stranger. The first day that I dined after you came, Algy made me a list of things that I was not to talk about to you."

"A list of sore subjects?" says my lover, laughing. "But how did the boy know what *were* my sore subjects? What were they, Nancy?"

"Oh, I do not know! I have forgotten," reply I, in some confusion. "I've made some very bad shots."

And so we slip away from the subject; but, all the same, I wish that I had not said it.

We have come to the day before the wedding. My spirits, which held up bravely during the first two weeks of my engagement, have now fallen—fallen, like a wind at sundown. I am as limp, lachrymose, and lamentable a young woman as you would find between the three seas. I have cried with loud publicity in full school-room conclave; I have cried with silent privacy in bed. I have cried over the jackdaw. I have cried over the bear. I have not cried over Vick, as I am to take her with me. To-day we have *all* cried—boys and all; and have moistened the bun-loaf and the gooseberry-jam at tea with our tears. Our spirits being now temporarily revived, I am undergoing the operation of trying my wedding-dress. I am having a private rehearsal, in fact, in mother's boudoir, with only mother, Barbara, and the maid, for audience.

"Mine is the most hopeless kind of ugliness," say I, with an admirable dispassionateness, as if I were talking of some one else, as, armed in full panoply, I stand staring at my white reflection in a long mirror let into the wall—staring at myself from top to toe—from the highest jasmine star of my wreath to the lowest edge of my Brussels flounce. "If I were very fat, I might fine down; if I were very thin, I might plump up; if I were very red, I might grow pale; if I were—hush! here are the boys. I would not for worlds that they should see me!"

So saying, I run behind the folding-screen—the screen which, through so many winter-evenings, we have adorned with gay and ingenious pictures, and which, after having worked openly at it under her nose for a year and a half, we presented to mother *as a surprise*, on her last birthday.

"Come out, ostrich!" cries Algy, laughing. "Do you suppose that you are hidden? Did it never occur to you that we could see your reflection in the glass?"

Thus adjured, I reissue forth.

"Did you ever see such a fool as I look?" say I, feeling very sneaky, and going through a few uncouth antics to disguise my confusion.

"Talk of *me* being a Brat," cries the Brat, triumphantly. "I am not half such a brat as you are! You look about ten years old!"

"Mark my words!" cries Bobby. "Wherever you go, on the Continent, you will be taken for a good little girl making a tour with her grandpapa!"

"Bobby is speaking at the top of his voice; as, indeed, we have all of us rather a bad habit of doing. Bobby has the most excuse for it, as, being a sailor, I suppose that he has to bellow a good deal at the blue-jackets. In the present case, he has *one* more listener than he thinks. Sir Roger is among us. The door has been left ajar, and he, hearing the merry clamor, and having always the *entrée* to mother's room, has entered. By the pained smile on his face, I can see that he has heard.

"You are right, my boy," he says, quite gently, looking kindly at the unfortunate Bobby; "she *does* look very—*very* young!"

"I shall mend of that!" cry I, briskly, putting my arm through his, in anxious amends for Bobby's hapless speech. "We are a family who age particularly early. I have a cousin whose hair was gray at five-and-twenty, and I am sure that any one who did not know father, would say that he was sixty, if he was a day—would not he, mother?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE preparations are ended; the guests are come; no great number. A few unavoidable Tempests, a few necessary Greys (I have told you, have not I, that my name is Grey?). The heels have been amputated from a large number of white satin slippers, preparatory to their being thrown after us. The school-children have had their last practice at the marriage-hymn.

I have resolved to rise at five o'clock on my wedding-morning, so as to make a last gloomy progress round every bird and beast and gooseberry-bush on the premises. I have exacted—binding her by many stringent oaths—a solemn promise from Barbara to make me, if I do not do so of my own accord, at the appointed hour. I am sunk in heavy sleep, and wake only very gradually, to find her, in conformity with her engagements, giving my shoulder reluctant and gentle pushes, and softly calling me.

"Is it five?" say I, sitting up and yawning. Then, as the recollection of my position flashes across my mind, "I will *not* be married!" I cry, turning round, and burying all my face in my pillow again. "Nobody shall induce me! Let some one go and tell Sir Roger so."

"Sir Roger is not awake," replies Barbara, laughing rather sleepily, "you forget that."

And by the time he is awake, I have come to a saner mind. We dress, for the last time, *alike*. The thought that never again shall I have a holland frock like Barbara's is nearly too much for us both. We run quietly downstairs, and out into as August a morning as God ever gave his poor pensioners.

We walk along soberly and silently, hand-in-hand, as we used to do when we were little children. My heart is very, *very* full. I may be going to be happy in my new life. I fully expect to be. At nineteen, happiness seems one's right, one's matter of course; but it will not be in the same way. *This* chapter of my life is ended, and it has been *such* a good chapter, so full of love, of healthy, strong affection, of interchanged, kind offices, and little glad self-denials, so abounding in good jokes and riotous laughter, in little pleasures that—looked back on—seem great; in little wholesome pains that—in retrospect—seem joys. And, as we walk, the birds

> "Prefer soft anthems to the ears of men
> To woo them from their beds, still murmuring
> That men can sleep while they their matin sing.
> Most divine service, whose so early lay
> Prevents the eyelids of the blushing day."

The old singers have said many a fine and lovely thing about lusty spring. From their pages there seems to come a whiff of clean and healthy perfume from many dead Mays. In sweet and matterful verse they have sung their praises; but, oh! no singer, old or new—none, at least, that was but human—none but a God-intoxicated man could tell the glories of that serenely shining and suave morn.

One so seldom sees the best part of a summer day! Buried in swinish slumber, with window-curtains heedfully drawn, and shutters closely fastened, between us and it, we know nothing of the stately pageant spread outside our doors.

It is wasted; nay, not wasted, for the birds have it. It is so early, that the gardening-men are not yet come to their work. Every thing is as wet as though there had been a shower, but there has been none.

Talk of the earth moving round the sun—he himself the while stupidly stock-still—let *them* believe it who like; is not he now placidly sailing through the turquoise sea? Below, the earth is unfolding all her freshened meadows, bravely pied with rainbow flowers. There is a very small soft wind, that comes in honeyed puffs and little sighs, that wags the lilac-heads, and the long droop of the laburnum-blooms. The grass is so wet—so wet—as we swish through it, every blade a separate green sparkle. The young daisies give our feet little friendly knocks as we pass.

All round the old flowering thorn there is a small carpet, milk-white and rose-red, of strewed petals. Every flower that has a cup, is holding it brimful of cool dew. Vick is sitting on the top of the stone steps, her ears pricked, and her little black nose working mysteriously as she sniffs the morning air.

On the bright gravel walk stands the jackdaw, looking rather a funereal object in his black suit, on this gaudy-colored day; his gray head very much on one side, his round, sly eyes turned upward in dishonest meditation. A worse bird than Jacky does not hop.

His life is one long course of larceny, and I know that, if he had the gift of speech, he would also be a consummate liar. I kneel on the walk, and, holding out a bit of cake, call him softly and clearly, "Jacky! Jacky!" He snatches it rudely, with a short hoarse caw, puts one black foot on it, and begins to peck.

"Jacky! Jacky!" say I, sorrowfully, "I am going to be married! Oh, you know that? You may thank your stars that you are not."

As I speak, my tears fall on his sleek black wings and his dear gray head. I try to kiss him; but he makes such a spiteful peck at my nose, that I have to give up the idea. Thus one of my good-bys is over. By the time that they are all ended, and we have returned to the house, I am drowned in tears, and my appearance for the day is irretrievably damaged. My nose is certainly *very* red. It surprises even myself, who have known its capabilities of old. Bobby, always prosaic, suggests that I shall hold it in the steam of boiling water, to reduce the inflammation. But I have not the heart to try this remedy. It may be sky-blue, for all I care. Nose or no nose, I am dressed now.

Instead of the costly artificial wreath that Madame Elise sent me, Barbara has made me a little natural garland of my own flowers—my Nancys. I smell them all the time that I am being married. I have no female friends—Barbara has always been friend enough for me—so I have stipulated that I shall have no other bridesmaids but her and Tou Tou. They are not much to brag of in the way of a match. Algy indeed has suggested that, in order to bring them into greater harmony, Tou Tou shall clothe her thin legs with long petticoats, or Barbara abridge her garments to Tou Tou's length; but the proposition has met with as little favor in the family's eyes as did Squire Thornhill's proposal, that every gentleman should sit on a lady's lap, in "The Vicar of Wakefield."

The guests are all off to the church. I follow with my parents. Mother is inclined to cry, until snubbed and withered into dry-eyedness by her consort. He is, however, all benignity to me. I catch myself wondering whether I *can* be his own daughter; whether I am not one of the train of neighboring misses who have sometimes made me the depositary of their raptures about him.

We reach the church. I am walking up the aisle on red cloth: the wedding-hymn is in my ears, gayly and briskly sung, though it *is* a hymn, and not an *Epithalamium:* a vague idea of many people is in my head. I am standing before the altar—the altar smothered in flowers. The old vicar who christened me is to marry me. I have declined the intervention of all strange bishops and curates whatsoever. He is a clergyman of the old school, and spares us not a word of the ritual.

Truly in no squeamish age was the marriage-service composed! I know—that is, I could have told you if you had asked me—that I am standing beside a large and stately person, to whom, if neither God nor man interpose to prevent it, I shall, within five minutes, be lawfully wed; but I do not in the least degree realize it.

Now and again a strong sense of the ludicrous rushes over me. There seems to me something acutely ridiculous in the idea of myself standing here, so finely dressed—of the boys, demure and prim in their tall hats and Sunday coats, gathered to see *me* married—*me* of all people!

Like lightning-flash there darts into my head the recollection of the *last time that I was married!* when, long ago, we were little children, one wet Sunday afternoon, for want of a job, I had espoused Bobby; and Algy, standing on a chair, with his night-gown on for a surplice, had married us. It is over now. I am aware that several persons of different genders have kissed me. I have signed my name. I am walking down the churchyard path, the bells jangling gayly above my head, drowning the sweet thrushes; and the school-children flinging bountiful garden flowers before my feet. It seems to me a sin to tread upon them. It goes to my heart. We reach the house. Vick comes out to meet us in a crawling, groveling manner, which owes its birth to the *shame* caused in her mind by the huge favor which my maid has tied round her little neck. We go into breakfast and feed—the *women* with easy minds; the *men*, with such appetites as the fear of impending speeches, of horrible shattered commonplaces leaves them.

I suppose that, despite my changes of name, I cannot yet be wholly a Tempest; for, while I remain perfectly serene and calm

during Sir Roger's few plain words, I am one red misery while Algy is returning thanks for the bridesmaids, which he does in so appallingly lame, stammering, and altogether agonizing a manner, that I have serious thoughts of slipping from my bridegroom's side under the friendly shade of the table, among its sheltering legs.

Thank God, it is over, and I am gone to put on my traveling-dress! The odious parting moment has come. The carriage is at the door: the maid and valet are in the dickey. What a pity that they are not bride and bridegroom too! Vick has jumped in—alert and self-respecting again, now that she has bitten off her favor.

I have begun my voluminous farewells. I have kissed them all round once, and am beginning again. How can one make up one's mind where to stop? with whom to end?

"Never you marry, Barbara!" say I, in a sobbing whisper, as I clasp her in my last embrace, greatly distorting my new bonnet, "it is so disagreeable!"

We are off, followed by a tornado of shoes—one, aimed with dexterous violence by that unlucky Bobby, goes nigh to cut the bridegroom's left eye open, as he waves his good-bys.

As we trot smartly away, I turn round in the carriage and look at them through my tears. There they all are! After all, what a nice-looking family! Even Tou Tou! there is something pretty about her, and, standing as she is now, her legs look quite nice and thick.

. . . . . .

We reach Dover before dinner-time, Sir Roger has gone out to speak to the courier who meets us there. I am left alone in our great, stiff sitting-room at the Lord Warden. Instantly I rush to the writing-materials.

"What, writing already?" says my husband, reëntering, and coming over with a smile toward me. "Have you forgotten any of your finery?"

"No, no!" cry I, impulsively, spreading both hands over the sheet; "do not look! you must not look!"

"Do you think I *should!*" he says, reproachfully, turning quickly away.

"But you may," cry I, with one of my sudden, useless remorses, holding out the note to him. "Do! I should like you to!—I do not know why I said it!—I was only sending them a line, just to tell them how *dreadfully* I missed them all!"

CHAPTER X.

I HAVE been married a week. A *week* indeed! a week in the sense in which the creation of the world occupied a week!—seven geological ages, perhaps, but *not* seven days. We have been to Brussels, to Antwerp, to Cologne. We have seen—(with the penetrating incense-odor in our nostrils, and the kneeling peasants at our feet)—the Descent from the Cross, the Elevation of the Cross—dead Christs manifold. Can it be possible that the brush which worthily painted Christ's agony, can be the same that descended to eternize redundant red fish-wives, and call them goddesses? We have given ourselves cricks in the necks, staring up at the divine incompleteness of Cologne Cathedral. And all through Crucifixions, cathedrals, *table-d'hôtes*, I have been deadly, *deadly* homesick—homesick as none but one that has been a member of a large family, and has been out into the world on his or her own account, for the first time, can understand. When first I drove away through the pack, my sensations were something like those that we all used to experience, on the rare occasions when father, as a treat, took one or other of us out on an excursion with him—the *honor* great, but the *pleasure* small.

It seems to myself, as if I had not laughed once since we set off!—yes—*once* I did, at the recollection of an old joke of Bobby's, that we all thought very silly at the time, but that strikes me as irresistibly funny now, that it recurs to me in the midst of strange scenes, and of jokeless foreigners.

After forty, people do not laugh at absolutely *nothing*. They may be very easily moved to mirth, as, indeed, to do him justice, Sir Roger is; but they do not laugh for the pure physical pleasure of grinning. The weight of the absolute *tête-à-tête* of a honey-moon, which has proved trying to a more violent love than mine, is oppressing me.

At home, if I grew tired of talking to one, I could talk to another. If I waxed weary of Bobby's sea-tales, I might refresh myself with

listening to the Brat's braggings about Oxford —with Tou Tou's murdered French lesson:

J'aime,	I love.
Tu aimes,	Thou lovest.
Il aime,	He loves.

How many thousand years ago, the labored conjugation of that verb seems to me!

Now, if I do not converse with Sir Roger, I must remain silent. And, somehow, I cannot talk to him now as fluently as I used. Before—during our short previous acquaintance—where I used to pester the poor man with filial aspirations that he could not reciprocate, there seemed no end of the things I had to say to him. I felt as if I could have told him any thing. I bubbled over with silly jests.

It never occurred to me to think whether I pleased him or not; but *now—now*, the sense of my mental inferiority—of the gulf of years and inequalities that yawns between us—weighs like a lump of lead upon me.

I am in constant fear of falling below his estimate of me. Before I speak, I think whether what I am going to say will be worth saying, and, as very few of my remarks come up to this standard, I become extremely silent. Oh, if we could meet some one we knew—even if it were some one that we rather disliked than otherwise: some one that would laugh and have as few wits as I, and be *young*.

But it is too early in the year for many people to be yet abroad, and, so far, we have fallen upon no acquaintances. Once, indeed, at Antwerp, I see in the distance a man whose figure bears a striking resemblance to that of "Toothless Jack," and my heart leaps—detestable as I have always thought Barbara's aspirant; but, on coming nearer, the likeness disappears, and I relapse into depression.

Long ago, I had told my husband—on the first day I had made his acquaintance, indeed—that I had no conversation, and now he is proving experimentally the truth of my confession. At home, our talk has always been made up of allusions, half-words, petrified witticisms, that have become part of our language. Each sentence would require a dictionary of explanation to any strange hearer. *Now*, if I wish to be understood, I must say my meaning in plain English, and very laborious I find it.

To-day, we are on our way from Cologne to Dresden; sixteen hours and a half at a stretch. This, of itself, is enough to throw the equablest mind off its balance.

We have a *coupé* to ourselves. This is quite opposed to my wishes, nor is it Sir Roger's doing, but Schmidt, the courier, knowing what is seemly on those occasions—what he has always done for all former freshly-wed couples whom he has escorted—secured it before we could prevent him. As for me, it would have amused me to see the people come in and out, to air my timid German in little remarks about the weather; albeit, I have thus early discovered that the German, which we have been exhorted to talk among ourselves in the schoolroom, to perfect us in that tongue, bears no very pronounced likeness to the language as talked by the indigenous inhabitants. They *will* talk so fast, and they never say any thing in the least like Ollendorff.

Sixteen hours and a half of a *tête-à-tête* more complete and unbroken than any we have yet enjoyed. All day I watch the endless, treeless, hedgeless German flats fly past; the straight-lopped poplars, the spread of tall green wheat, the blaze of rape-fields—the villages and towns, with two-towered German churches, over and over, and over again. Oh, for a hill, were it no bigger than a molehill! Oh, for a broad-armed English oak!

At Minden we stop to lunch. The whole train pushes and jostles into the refreshment-room, and, in ten galloping minutes, we devour three filthy *plats;* a nauseous potage, a terrible dish of sickly veal, and a ragged Braten. Then a rush and tumble off again.

The day rolls past, dustily, samely, wearily. There have been flying thunder-storms—lightning-flashes past the windows. I hide my face in my dusty gloves to avoid seeing the quick red forks, and leave a smear on each grimy cheek. Every moment, I am a rape-field—a corn-field, a bean-field, farther from Barbara, farther from the Brat, farther from the jackdaw.

"This is rather a long day for you, child!" says Sir Roger, kindly, perceiving, I suppose, the joviality of the expression with which I am eying the German landscape. "The most tedious railway-journey you ever took, I suppose?"

"Yes," reply I, "far! It seems like

three Sundays rolled into one, does not it? What time is it now?"

He takes out his watch and looks.

"Twenty past five."

"*Seven* hours more!" say I, with a burst of desperateness.

"I am so sorry for you, Nancy! what can one do for you?" says my husband, looking thoroughly discomfited, concerned, and helpless. "Would you care to have a book?"

"I cannot read in a train," reply I, dolorously, "it makes me *sick!*" Then feeling rather ashamed of my peevishness—"Never mind me!" I say, with a dusty smile; "I am quite happy! I—I—like looking out."

The day falls, the night comes. On, on, on! There is a bit of looking-glass opposite me. I can no longer see any thing outside. I have to sit staring at my own plain, grimed, bored face. In a sudden fury, I draw the little red silk curtain across my own image. Thank God! I can no longer see myself. Sir Roger ceases to try his eyes with the print of the *Westminster*, and closes it.

"I wonder," say I, pouring some eau-de-cologne on my pocket-handkerchief, and trying to cleanse my face therewith, but only succeeding in making it a muddy instead of a dusty smudge—"I wonder whether we shall meet any one we know at Dresden?"

"I should not wonder," replies Sir Roger, cheerfully.

"Is the Hôtel de Saxe the place where most English go?" inquire I, anxiously. "Ah, you do not know! I must ask Schmidt."

"Yes, do."

"I hope we shall," say I, straining my eyes to make out the objects in the dark outside. "We have been very unlucky so far, have not we?"

"Are you so anxious to meet people? are you so dull already, Nancy?" he asks, in that voice of peculiar gentleness which I have already learned to know hides inward pain.

"Oh, no, no!" cry I, with quick remorse. "Not at all! I have always *longed* to travel! At one time Barbara and I were always talking about it, making plans, you know, of where we would go. I enjoy it, of all things, especially the pictures—but do not you think it would be amusing to have some one to talk to at the *table d'hôte*, some one English, to laugh at the people with?"

"Yes," he answers, readily, "of course it would. It is quite natural that you should wish it. I heartily hope we shall. We will go wherever it is most likely."

After long, *long* hours of dark rushing, Dresden at last. We drive in an open carriage through an unknown town, moonlit, silent, and asleep. German towns go to bed early. We cross the Elbe, in which a second moon, big and clear as the one in heaven, lies quivering, waving with the water's wave; then through dim, ghostly streets, and at last—at last—we pull up at the door of the Hôtel de Saxe, and the sleepy porter comes out dishevelled.

"There is no doubt," say I, aloud, when I find myself alone in my bedroom, Sir Roger not having yet come up, and the maid having gone to bed—addressing the remark to the hot water in which I have been bathing my face, stiff with dirt, and haggard with fatigue. "There is no use denying it, I *hate* being married!"

CHAPTER XI.

We have been in Dresden three whole days, and as yet my aspirations have not met their fulfillment. We have met no one we know. We have borrowed the Visitors' Book from the porter, and diligently searched it. We have expectantly examined the guests at the *table d'hôte* every day, but with no result. It is too early in the year. The hotel is not half full. Of its inmates one half are American, a quarter German, and the other quarter English, such as not the most rapidly social mind can wish to forgather with. At the discovery of our ill-success, Sir Roger looks so honestly crestfallen that my heart smites me.

"How eager you are!" I say, laying my hand on his, with a smile. "You are far more anxious about it than I am! I begin to think that you are growing tired of me already! As for me," continue I, nonchalantly, seeing his face brighten at my words, "I think I have changed my mind. Perhaps it would be rather a *bore* to meet any acquaintances, and—and—we do very well as we are, do not we?"

"Is that true, Nancy?" he says, eagerly. "I have been bothering my head rather with

the notion that I was but poor company for a little young thing like you; that you must be wearying for some of your own friends."

"I never had a friend," reply I, "*never*—that is—except *you!* The boys"—(with a little stealing smile)—"always used to call you my friend—always from the first, from the days I used to take you out walking, and keep wishing that you were my father, and be rather hurt because I never could get you to echo the wish."

"And you are not much disappointed *really?*" he says, with a wistful persistence, as if he but half believed the words my lips made. "If you are, mind you tell me, child—tell me every thing that vexes you—*always!*"

"I will tell you every thing that happens to me, bad and good," reply I, quite gayly, "and all the unlucky things I say—there, that is a large promise, I can tell you!"

I am no longer dusty and grimy; quite spick and span, on the contrary; so freshly and prettily dressed, indeed, that the thought *will* occur to me that it is a pity there are not more people to see me. However, no doubt some one will turn up by-and-by. The weather is serenely, evenly fine. It seems as if no rain *could* come from such a high blue sky. It is late afternoon or early evening. Since dinner is over—dinner at the godless hour of half-past four—I suppose we must call it evening. Sir Roger and I are driving out in an open carriage beyond the town, across the Elbe, up the shady road to Weisserhoisch. The calm of coming night is falling with silky softness upon every thing. The acacias stand on each side of the highway, with the delicate abundance of their airy flowers faintly yet most definitely sweet on the evening air.

I look up and see the crowded blooms drooping in pensive beauty above my head. The guelder-rose's summer snow-balls, and the mock-orange with its penetrating odor, whiten the still gardens as we pass. The billowy meadow-grass, the tall red sorrel, the untidy ragged robin, all the yearly-recurring May miracles! What can I say, O my friends, to set them fairly before you?

Under the trees the townsfolk are walking, chatting low and friendly. A soldier has his arm round a fat-faced Mädchen's waist, an attention which she takes with the stolidity engendered by long habit. Dear, willing, panting dogs, are laboriously dragging the washerwomen's little carts up-hill.

"Vick," say I, gravely, "how would you like to drag a little cart to the wash?"

Vick does not answer verbally, but she stretches her small neck over the carriage-side, and gives a disdainful yet inquisitive *smell* at her low brethren. No words could express a fuller contempt for a dog that earns his own living.

The driver is taking his horses along very easily, but we do not care to hurry him. I have not felt so happy, so at ease, so gay, since I was wed.

"This *is* nice," say I, making a frantic snatch at a long acacia-droop; "*how* I wish they were *all* here!"

Sir Roger laughs a little, and raises his eyebrows slightly.

"Do you mean *with us—now—in the carriage?* Should not we be rather a tight fit?"

"Rather," say I, laughing too. "We should be puzzled how to pack them all, should not we? We would be like the animals in a Noah's ark."

A little pause.

"General," say I, impulsively, "it has just occurred to me, are not you sometimes deadly, *deadly* tired of hearing about the boys? I am sure I should be, if I were you. Confess! I will try not to be any angrier with you than I can help; but do not you sometimes wish that Algy and Bobby and the Brat—not to speak of Tou Tou—were drowned in the Red Sea, or in the horse-pond, at home?"

"At least you gave me fair warning," he says, with a smile. "Do you remember telling me that whoever married you would have to marry all six?"

"I wish you would not remind me of that," say I, reddening.

It was quite the broadest hint any one ever gave. The evening is deepening. We have reached Weisserhoisch. Now our faces are turned homeward again. As we pass the entrance to the Gardens of the Linnisches Bad, we see the lamps springing into light, and the people gayly yet quietly trooping in, while on the soft evening air comes the swell of merry music.

"Stop! stop!" cry I, springing up, ex-

citedly. "Let us go in. I *love* a band! It is almost as good as a circus. May we, general? Do you mind? Would it bore you?"

Five minutes more, and we are sitting at a little round table, each with a tall green glass of Mai-Trank before us, and a brisk Uhlanenritt in our ears. I look round with a pleasant sense of dissipation. The still, green trees; the cluster of oval lamps, like great ostrich-eggs; the countless little tables like our own; the happy social groups; the waiters running madly about with bif-tecks; the great-lidded goblets of amber-colored Bohemian beer; the young Bavarian officers, in light-blue uniforms, at the next table to us—stalwart, fair-haired boys—I should not altogether mind knowing a few of them; and, over all, the arch of suave, dark, evening sky.

"What shall we have for supper?" cry I, vivaciously. "I never can see anybody eating without longing to eat too. *Blutwurst!* That means black-pudding, I suppose — certainly not *that*—how they do call a spade a spade in German! By-the-by, what are the soldiers having? Can you see? I think I saw a vision of *prawns!* I saw things sticking out like their legs. I *must* find out!"

I rise, on pretense of getting a little wooden stool from under an unoccupied table close to the object of my curiosity, and, as I stoop to pick it up, I fraudulently glance over the nearest warrior's shoulder. My sin finds me out. He turns and catches me in the act, and at the same time a young man—*not* a warrior, at least not in uniform, but in loose gray British clothes—turns, too, and fixes me with a stony, British stare. I am returning in some confusion, having moreover incidentally discovered that they were *not* prawns, when, to my extreme surprise, I hear my husband addressing the young gentleman in gray.

"Why, Frank, my dear boy, is that you? Who would have thought of seeing *you* here?"

"As to that," replies the young man, stretching out a ready right hand, "who would have thought of seeing *you?* What on earth has brought *you* here?"

Sir Roger laughs, but with a sort of shyness.

"Like the man in the parable, I have married a wife," he says; then, putting his hand kindly on the young fellow's shoulder — "Nancy, you have been wishing that we might meet some one we knew, have not you? Well, here is some one. I suppose that I must introduce you formally to each other. Lady Tempest—Mr. Musgrave."

Despite the searching, and, I should have thought, exhaustive examination of my appearance, that my new friend had already indulged in, he thinks good to look at me again, as he bows, and this time with a sort of undisguisable surprise in his great dark eyes.

"I must apologize," he says, taking off his hat. "I had heard that you were going to be married, but I am so behind the time, have been so out of the way of hearing news, that I did not know that it had come off yet."

He says this with a little of that doubtful stiffness, which sometimes owes its birth to shyness, and sometimes to self-consciousness; but he seems in no hurry to return to his friends, the big, blond soldiers. On the contrary, he draws a chair up to our table.

"Do they ever get *prawns* here?" say I, with apparent irrelevancy, not being able to disengage my mind from the thought of shellfish, "or is it too far inland? I am *so* fond of them, and I fancied that these gentlemen" (slightly indicating the broad, blue warrior-backs) "were eating some."

His mouth curves into a sudden smile.

"Was that why you came to look?"

I laugh.

"I did not mean to be seen; that person must have had eyes in the back of his head."

I relapse into silence, and fish for the sprigs of woodruff floating in my Mai-Trank, while the talk passes to Sir Roger. Presently I become aware that the stranger is addressing me by that new title which makes me disposed to laugh.

"Lady Tempest, have you seen those lamps that they have here, in the shape of flowers? Cockney sort of things, but they are rather pretty."

"No," say I, eagerly, dropping my spoon and looking up; "*in the shape of flowers?* Where?"

"You cannot see them from here," he answers; "they are over there, nearer the river."

"I should like to see them," say I, decisively; "shall we, general?"

"Will you spare Lady Tempest for five minutes?" says the young man, addressing my husband; "it is not a hundred yards off."

At *my* words Sir Roger had made a slight movement toward rising; but, at the stranger's, he resettles himself in his chair.

"Will you not come, too? Do!" say I, pleadingly; and, as I speak, I half stretch out my hand to lay it on his arm; then hastily draw it back, afraid and ashamed of vexing him by public demonstrations.

He looks up at me with a smile, but shakes his head.

"I think I am lazy," he says; "I will wait for you here."

We set off; I with a strongish but unexplained feeling of resentment against my companion.

"Where are they?" I ask, pettishly; "not far off, I hope! I do not fancy I shall care about them!"

"I did not suppose that you would," he replies, in an extremely happy tone; "would you like us to go back?"

"No," reply I, carelessly, "it would not be worth while now we have started."

We march on in solemn silence, not particularly pleased with each other. I am staring about me, with as greedily wondering eyes as if I were a young nun let loose for the first time. We pass a score—twoscore, threescore, perhaps—of happy parties, soldiers again, a *bourgeois* family of three generations, the old grandmother with a mushroom-hat tied over her cap—soldiers and Fräuleins *coketteering*. The air comes to our faces, dry, warm, and elastic, yet freshened by the river, far down in whose quiet heart all the lamps are burning again.

"Have you been here long?" says Mr. Musgrave, presently, in a formal voice, from which I see that resentment is not yet absent.

"Yes," say I, having on the other hand fully recovered my good-humor, "a good while—that is, not very long—three, four, three whole days."

"Do you call that a *good while?*"

"It seems more," reply I, looking frankly back at him in the lamplight, and thinking that he cannot be much older than Algy, and that, in consequence, it is rather a comfort not to be obliged to feel the slightest respect for him.

"And how long have you been abroad altogether?"

We have reached the flower-lamps. We are standing by the bed in which they are supposed to grow. There are half a dozen of them: a fuchsia, a convolvulus, lilies.

"I do not think much of them," say I, disparagingly, kneeling down to examine them. "What a villainous rose! It is like an *artichoke!*"

"I told you you would not like them," he says, not looking at the flowers, but switching a little stick nonchalantly about; then, after a moment: "How long did you say you had been abroad?"

"You asked me that before," reply I, sharply, rising from my knees, and discovering that the evening grass has left a disfiguring green trace on my smart *trousseau* gown.

"Yes, and you did not give me any answer," he replies, with equal sharpness.

"Because I cannot for the life of me recollect," reply I, looking up for inspiration to the stars, which the great bright lamps make look small and pale. "I must do a sum: what day of the month is this?—the 31st? Oh, thanks, so it is; and we were married on the 20th. It is ten days, then, Oh, it *must* be more—it seems like ten *months*."

I am looking him full in the face as I say this, and I see a curious, and to me *puzzling*, expression of inquiry and laughter in the shady darkness of his eyes.

"Has the time seemed so long to you, then?"

"No," reply I, reddening with vexation at my own *bêtise;* "that is—yes—because we have been to so many places and seen so many things—any one would understand *that*."

"And when do you go home?"

"In less than three weeks now," I reply, in an alert, or rather joyful tone; "at least I hope so—I mean" (again correcting myself)—"I *think* so."

Somehow I feel dissatisfied with my own explanations, and recommence:

"The boys—that is, my brothers—will soon be scattered to the ends of the earth; Algy has got his commission, and Bobby will soon be sent to a foreign station—he is in the navy, you will understand; and so we all want to be together once again before they go."

"You are not going home *really*, then?"

inquires my companion, with a slight shade of disappointment in his tone; "not to *Tempest*—that is?"

"What a number of questions you do ask!" say I, impatiently. "Of what possible interest can it be to you where we are going?"

"Only that I shall be your nearest neighbor," replies he, stiffly; "and, as Sir Roger has hardly ever been down hitherto, I am rather tired of living next an empty house."

"Our nearest neighbor!" cry I, with animation, opening my eyes. "Not *really?* Well, I am rather glad! Only yesterday I was asking Sir Roger whether there were many young people about. And *how* near are you? *Very* near?"

"About as near as I well can be," answers he, dryly. "My lodge exactly faces yours."

"Too close," say I, shaking my head. "We shall quarrel."

"And do you mean to say," in a tone of attempted lightness that but badly disguises a good deal of hurt conceit, "that you never heard my name before?"

Again I shake my head.

"Never! and, what is more, I do not think I know what it is now: I suppose I did dot listen very attentively, but I do not think I caught it."

"And your tone says" (with a very considerable accession of huffiness) "that you are supremely indifferent as to whether you *ever* catch it."

I laugh.

"*Catch* it! you talk as if it were a *disease*. Well" (speaking demurely), "perhaps on the whole it *would* be more convenient if I were to know it."

Silence.

"Well! what is it?"

No answer.

"I shall have to ask at your lodge!"

"Who *can* pronounce his *own* name in cold blood?" he says, reddening a little. "I, for one, cannot—there—if you do not mind looking at this card—"

He takes one out of his pocket, and I stop—we are slowly strolling back—under a lamp, to read it:

MR. FRANCIS MUSGRAVE,
MUSGRAVE ABBEY.

"Oh, thanks—*Musgrave*—yes."

"And Sir Roger has never mentioned me to you—*really?*" he says, recurring with persistent hurt vanity to the topic. "How very odd of him!"

"Not in the least odd!" reply I, brusquely. "Why should he? He knew that I was not aware of your existence, and that therefore you would not be a very interesting subject to me; no doubt"—(smiling a little)—"I shall hear all about you from him now."

He is silent.

"And do you live *here* at this abbey"—(pointing to the card I still hold in my hand)—"*all by yourself?*"

"Do you mean without a *wife?*" he asks, with a half-sneering smile. "Yes—I have that misfortune."

"I was not thinking of a *wife*," say I, rather angrily. "It never occurred to me that you could have one! you are too young—a great deal too young!"

"*Too young*, am I? At what age, then, may one be supposed to deserve that blessing? forty? fifty? sixty?"

I feel rather offended, but cannot exactly grasp in my own mind the ground of offense.

"I meant, of course, had you any father? any mother?"

"Neither. I am that most affecting spectacle—an orphan boy."

"You have no brothers and sisters, I am *sure*," say I, confidently.

"I have not, but why you should be *sure* of it, I am at a loss to imagine."

"You seem to take offense rather easily," I say, ingenuously. "You looked quite cross when I said I did not think much of the flowers—and again when I said I had forgotten your name—and again when I told you you were too young to have a wife: now, you know, in a large family, one has all that sort of nonsense knocked out of one."

"Has one?" (rather shortly).

"Nobody would mind whether one were huffy or not," continue I; "they would only laugh at one."

"What a pleasant, civil-spoken thing a large family must be!" he says, dryly.

We have reached Sir Roger. I had set off on my little expedition feeling rather out of conceit with my young friend, and I return with those dispositions somewhat aggravated.

We find my husband sitting where we left him, placidly smoking and listening to the band.

"Four-and-twenty fiddlers all in a row!"

They have long finished the Uhlanenritt, and are now clashing out a brisk Hussarenritt, in which one plainly hears the hussars' thundering gallop, while the conductor madly waves his arms, as he has being doing unintermittingly for the last two hours.

"You were quite wise," say I, laying my hand on the back of his chair; "you had much the best of it! they were a great imposture!"

"Were they?" he says, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and lifting his handsome and severe iron-gray eyes to mine. "They were farther off than you thought, were not they? I began to think you had not been able to find them."

"Have we been so long?" I say, surprised. "It did not *seem* long! I suppose we dawdled. We began to talk—bah! it is growing chill! let us go home!"

Mr. Musgrave accompanies us to the entrance to the gardens.

"Good-night, Frank!" cries Sir Roger, as he follows me into the carriage.

As soon as I am in, I recollect that I have ungratefully forgotten to shake hands with my late escort.

"Good-night!" cry I, too, stretching out a compunctious hand, over Sir Roger and the carriage-side. "I am so sorry! I forgot all about you!"

"What hôtel are you at?" asks Sir Roger, closing the carriage-door after him. "The Victoria? Oh, yes. We are at the Saxe. You must come and look us up when you have nothing better to do. Our rooms are number —what is it, Nancy? I never can recollect."

"No. 5," reply I. "But, indeed, it is not much use any one coming to call upon us, is it? For we are always out—morning, noon, and night."

With this parting encouragement on my part, we drive off, and leave our young friend trying, with only moderate success, to combine a gracious smile to Sir Roger, with a resentful scowl at me, under a lamp-post. We roll along quickly and easily, through the soft, cool, lamplit night.

"Well, how did you get on with him, Nancy?" asks Sir Roger. "Good-looking fellow, is not he?"

"Is he?" say I, carelessly. "Yes, I suppose he is, only that I never *can* admire *dark* men: I am so glad that all the boys are fair—I should have hated a *black* brother."

"How do you know that my hair was not coal-black before it turned gray?" he asks, with a smile. "It may have been the hue of the carrion-crow for all you know."

"I am *sure* it was not," reply I, stoutly; then, after a little pause, "I do not think that I *did* get on well with him—not what *I* call getting on—he seems rather a touchy young gentleman."

"You must not quarrel with him, Nancy," says Sir Roger, laughing. "He lives not a stone's-throw from us."

"So he told me."

"Poor fellow!" with an accent of compassion. "He has never had much of a chance; he has been his own master almost ever since he was born—a bad thing for any boy—he has no parents, you know."

"So he told me."

"Neither has he any brothers or sisters."

"So he told me."

"He seems to have told you a great many things."

"Yes," reply I, "but then I asked him a great many questions: our conversation was rather like the catechism: the moment I stopped asking *him* questions, he began asking me!"

CHAPTER XII.

THREE long days—all blue and gold—blue sky and gold sunshine—roll away. If Schmidt, the courier, *has* a fault, it is over-driving us. We visit the Grüne Gewölbe, the Japanese Palace, the Zwinger—and we visit them *alone*. Dresden is not a very large place, yet in no part of it, in none of its bright streets—in neither its old nor its new market, in none of its public places, do I catch a glimpse of my new acquaintance. Neither does he come to call. This last fact surprises me a little, and disappoints me a good deal. Our walk at the Linnisches Bad in the gay lamplight, his character, his conversation, even his appear-

ance, begin to undergo a transformation in my mind. After all, he was not *really* dark—not one of those black men, against whom Barbara and I have always lifted up our testimonies; by daylight, I think his eyes would have been hazel. He certainly was very easy to talk to. One had not to pump up conversation for him, and I do not suppose that, *as men go*, he was *really* very touchy. One cannot expect everybody to be so jest-hardened and robustly good-tempered as the boys. Often before now I have only been able to gauge the unfortunateness of my speeches to men, by the rasping effect they have had on their tempers, and which has often taken me honestly by surprise.

"*Again*, Mr. Musgrave has not been to call," say I, one afternoon, on returning from a long and rather grilling drive, speaking in a slightly-annoyed tone.

"Did you expect that he would?" asks Sir Roger, with a smile. "I think that, after the searching snub you gave him, he would have been a bolder man than I take him for, if he had risked his head in the lion's mouth."

"*Am* I such a lion?" say I, with an accent of vexation. "*Did* I snub him? I am sure I had no more idea of snubbing him than I had of snubbing *you;* that is the way in which I always cut my own throat!"

I draw a chair into the balcony, where he has already established himself with his cigar, and sit down beside him.

"I foresee," say I, beginning to laugh rather grimly, "that a desert will spread all round our house! your friends will disappear before my tongue, like morning mist."

"Let them!"

After a pause, edging a little nearer to him, and, regardless of the hay-carts in the market below—laying my fair-haired head on his shoulder.

"What *could* have made you marry such a *shrew?* I believe it was the purest philanthropy."

"That was it!" he answers, fondly. "To save any other poor fellow from such an infliction!"

"Quite unnecessary!" rejoin I, shaking my head. "If you had not married me, it is very certain that nobody else would!"

Another day has come. It is hot afternoon. Sir Roger is reading the *Times* in our balcony, and I am strolling along the dazzling streets by myself. What can equal the white glare of a foreign town? I am strolling along by myself under a big sun-shade. My progress is slow, as my nose has a disposition to flatten itself against every shop-window—saving, perhaps, the cigar ones. A grave problem is engaging my mind. What present am I to take to father? It is this question which moiders our young brains as often as his birthday recurs. My thoughts are trailing back over all our former gifts to him. This year we gave him a spectacle-case (he is short-sighted); last year a pocket-book; the year before, an inkstand. What is there left to give him? A cigar-case? He does not smoke. A hunting-flask? He has half a dozen. A Norwegian stove? He does not approve of them, but says that men ought to be satisfied with sandwiches out shooting. A telescope? He never lifts his eyes high enough above our delinquencies to look at the stars. I cannot arrive at any approximation to a decision. As I issue from a china-shop, with a brown-paper parcel under my arm, and out on the hot and glaring flags, I see a young man come stepping down the street, with a long, loose, British stride; a young man, pale and comely, and a good deal worn out by the flies, that have also eaten most of me.

"How are you?" cry I, hastily shifting my umbrella to the other hand, so as to have my right one ready to offer him. "Are not these streets blinding? I am blinking like an owl in daylight!—so you never came to see us, after all!"

"It was so likely that I should!" he answers, with his nose in the air.

"Very likely!" reply I, taking him literally; "so likely that I have been expecting you every day."

"You seem to forget — confound these flies"—(as a stout blue-bottle blunders into one flashing eye)—"you seem to forget that you told me, in so many words, to stay away."

"You *were* huffy, then!" say I, with an accent of incredulity. "Sir Roger was right! he said you were, and I could not believe it; he was quite sorry for you. He said I had snubbed you so."

"*Snubbed* me!" reddening self-consciously, and drawing himself up as if he did not much relish the application of the word. "I do not often give any one the chance of doing that *twice!*"

"You are not going to be offended *again*, I suppose," say I, apprehensively; "it must be with Sir Roger this time, if you are! it was he that was sorry for you, not *I*."

We look at each other under my green sun-shade (his eyes *are* hazel, by daylight), and then we both burst into a duet of foolish friendly laughter.

"I want you to give me your advice," say I, as we toddle amicably along, side by side. "What would be a nice present for a gentleman—an elderly gentleman—at least *rather* elderly, who *has* a spectacle-case, a pocket-book, an inkstand, six church services, and who does not smoke?"

"But he *does* smoke," says Mr. Musgrave, correcting me. "I *saw* him the other day."

"Saw *whom?* What—do you mean?"

"Are not you talking of Sir Roger?" he asks, with an accent of surprise.

"*Sir Roger!*" (indignantly). "No, indeed! do you think *he* wants spectacles? No! I was talking of my father."

"*Your father?* You are not, like me, a poor misguided orphan, then; you have a father?"

"I should think I *had*," reply I, expressively.

"Any brothers? Oh, yes, by-the-by, I know you have! you held them up for my imitation the other day—half a dozen fellows who never take offense at any thing."

"No more they do!" cry I, firing up. "If I tell them when I go home, as I certainly shall, if I remember, that you were out of humor and bore malice for *three* whole days, because I happened to say that we were generally out-of-doors most of the day—they will not believe it—simply they will not."

"And have you also six sisters?" asks the young man, dexterously shifting the conversation a little.

"No, two."

"And are they *all* to have presents?—six and two is eight, and your father nine, and—I suppose you have a mother, too?"

"Yes."

"Nine and one is ten—ten brown-paper parcels, each as large as the one you have now under your arm—by-the-by, would you like me to carry it? *What* a lot you will have to pay for extra luggage!"

His offer to carry my parcel is so slightly and incidentally made, and is so unaccompanied by any gesture suited to the words, that I decline the attention. The people pass to and fro in the sun as we pace leisurely along.

"Have you nearly done your shopping?" asks my companion, presently.

"Very nearly."

"What do you say to taking a tour through the gallery?" he says, "or are you sick of the pictures?"

"Far from it," say I, briskly, "but, all the same, I cannot do it; I am going back at once to Sir Roger; we are to drive to Loschwitz: I only came out for a little prowl by myself, to think about father's present! Sir Roger cannot help me at all," I continue, marching off again into the theme which is uppermost in my thoughts. "*He* suggested a traveling-bag, but I know that father would *hate* that."

"To *drive!* this time of day!" cried Mr. Musgrave, in a tone of extreme disapprobation; "will not you get well baked?"

"I dare say," I answer, absently; then, in a low tone to myself, "*why* does not he smoke? it would be so easy, then—a smoking-cap, a tobacco-pouch, a cigar-holder, a hundred things!"

"Is it *quite* settled about Loschwitz?" asks the young man, with an air of indifference.

"Quite," say I, still not thinking of what I am saying. "That is, no—not quite—nearly—a bag *is* useful, you know."

"I passed the Saxe just now," he says, giving his hat a little tilt over his nose, "and saw Sir Roger sitting in the balcony, with his cigar and his *Times*, and he looked so luxuriously comfortable that it seemed a sin to disturb him. Do not you think, taking the dust and the blue-bottles into consideration, that it would be kinder to leave him in peace in his arm-chair?"

"No, I do not," reply I, flatly. "I suppose he knows best what he likes himself; and why a strong, hearty man in the prime of life should be supposed to wish to spend a

whole summer afternoon nodding in an arm-chair, any more than you would wish it yourself, I am at a loss to inquire!" The suggestion has irritated me so much that for the moment I forget the traveling-bag.

"When I am as old as he," replies the young man, coldly, shaking the ash off his cigar, "if I ever am, which I doubt, and have knocked about the world for as many years, and imperiled my liver in as many climates, and sent as many Russians, and Chinamen, and Sikhs to glory as he has, I shall think myself entitled to sit in an arm-chair—yes, and sleep in it too—all day, if I feel inclined."

I do not answer, partly because I am exasperated, and partly because at this moment my eye is caught by an object in a shop-window—a traveling-bag, with its mouth invitingly open, displaying all manner of manly conveniences. I hastily furl my green umbrella, and step in. My squire does not follow me. I hardly notice the fact, but suppose that he is standing outside in the sun. However, when I reissue forth, I find that he has disappeared. I look up the street, down the street. There is no trace of him. I walk away, feeling a little mortified. I go into a few more shops: I dawdle over some china. Then I turn my steps homeward.

At a narrow street corner, in the grateful shade cast by some tall houses, I come face to face with him again.

"Did not you wonder where I had disappeared to? he asks; "or perhaps you never noticed that I had?"

He is panting a little, as if he had been running or walking fast.

"I thought that most likely you had taken offense again," reply I, with a laugh, "and that I had lost sight of you for three more days."

"I have been to the Hôtel de Saxe," he replies, with a rather triumphant smile on his handsome mustacheless lips. "I thought I would find out about Loschwitz."

"Find out *what?*" cry I, standing still, raising my voice a little, and growing even redder than the sun, the flies, the brown-paper parcel, and the heavy umbrella, have already made me. "There was nothing to find out! I wish you would leave things alone; I wish you would let me manage my own business."

The smile disappears rather rapidly.

"You have not been telling the general," continue I, in a tone of rapid apprehension, "that I did not want to go with him? because, if you have, it was a great, great *mistake.*"

"I told him nothing of the kind," replies Mr. Musgrave, looking, like me, fierce, but—unlike me—cool and pale. "I was not so inventive. I merely suggested that sunstroke would most likely be your portion if you went now, and that it would be quite as easy, and a great deal pleasanter, to go three hours later."

"Yes? and he said—what?"

"He was foolish enough to agree with me."

We are standing in a little, quiet street, all shade and dark shops. There are very few passers-by. I feel rather ashamed of myself, and my angry eyes peruse the pavement. Neither does he speak. Presently, I look up at him rather shyly.

"How about the gallery? the pictures?"

"Do you wish to go there?" he asks, with rather the air of a polite martyr. "I shall be happy to take you if you like."

"Do!" say I, heartily, "let us try to be friends, and to spend five minutes without quarreling?"

. . . . . .

We have spent more than five, a great deal more—thirty, forty, perhaps, and our harmony is still unbroken, *uncracked* even. We have sat in awed and chastened silence before the divine meekness of the Sistine Madonna. We have turned away in disgust from Jordain's brutish "Triumphs of Silenus," and tiresome repetitions of Hercules in drink. We have admired the exuberance of St. Mary of Egypt's locks, and irreverently compared them to the effects of Mrs. Allen's "World-wide Hair Restorer." We have observed that the forehead of Holbein's great Virgin is too high to please *us*, and made many other connoisseur-like remarks. I have pointed out to Mr. Musgrave the Saint Catherine which has a look of Barbara, and we have both grown rather tired of St. Sebastian, stuck as full of darts as a pin-cushion of pins. Now we are sitting down resting our eyes and our strained powers of criticism, and have fallen into easy talk.

"I am glad you are coming to dine at our *table-d'hôte* to-night," say I, in a friendly tone. "It will be nice for the general to

have an Englishman to talk to. I hope you will sit by him; he has been so much used to men all his life that he must get rather sick of having nothing but the chatter of one woman to depend upon."

"At least he has no one but himself to blame for that," replies the young fellow, laughing. "I suppose it was his own doing."

"How do you know that?" cry I, gayly, and then the recollection of my *hint* to Sir Roger—a remembrance that always makes me rather hot—comes over me, and causes me to turn my head quickly away with a red blush. "It certainly *has* a look of Barbara," I say, glancing toward the Saint Catherine, and rushing quickly into another subject.

"Has it?" he says, apparently unaware of the rapidity of my transition. "Then I wish I knew Barbara."

I laugh.

"I dare say you do."

"She is not much like you, I suppose?" he says, turning from the saint's straight and strict Greek profile to the engaging irregularity of mine.

"Not exactly," say I, with emphasis. "Ah!" (in a tone of prospective triumph), "wait till you see her!"

"I am afraid that I shall have to wait some time."

"The Brat—that is one of my brothers, you know—is the one like me," I say, becoming diffuse, as I always do, when the theme of my family is started; we *are* like! We can see it ourselves."

"Is he one of the thick-skinned six that you told me about?"

"There are *not* six," cry I, impatiently. "I do not know what put it into your head that there were *six;* there are only *three.*

"You certainly told me there were six."

"I am *he* in petticoats," say I resuming the thread of my own narrative; everybody sees the likeness. One day when he was three or four years younger, we dressed him up in my things—my gown and bonnet, you know—and all the servants took him for me; they only found him out because he held up his gown so awkwardly high, and gave it such great kicks to keep it out of his way, that they saw his great nailed boots! Sir Roger thought we were twins the first time he saw us."

"Sir Roger!" repeats the young man, as if reminded by the name of something he had meant to say. "Oh, by-the-by, if you will not think me impertinent for asking, where did you first fall in with Sir Roger? I should have thought that he was rather out of your beat; you do not hail from his part of the world, do you?"

"No," reply I, my thoughts traveling back to the day when we made taffy, and tumbled over each other, hot and sticky to the window to see the dog-cart bearing the stranger roll up the drive. "I never saw him till this last March, when he came to stay with us."

"To stay with you?"

"Yes," reply I, thinking of our godless jokes about his wig and his false calves, and smiling gently to myself; "he was an old friend of father's."

"A contemporary, I suppose?" (a little inquisitively).

"Yes, he was at school with father," I answer; and the moment I have given utterance to the abhorred formula I repent.

"At school with him?" (speaking rather slowly, and looking at me, with a sort of flickering smile in his lips and eyes). "Oh, I see!"

"What do you see?" cry I, sharply.

"Nothing, nothing! I only meant to say, I understand, I comprehend."

"There is nothing to understand," reply I, brusquely, and rising. "I am tired—I shall go home!"

We walk back rather silently; there is nothing so trying to eyes and mind as picture-seeing, and I am fagged, and also indefinitely, yet certainly, cross. As we reach the door of the Saxe, I hold out my hand.

"Now that we have come to the end of our walk," say I, "and that you cannot think that I am *hinting* to you, I will tell you that I think it was very ill-mannered and selfish of you not to *insist* on carrying *this*" (holding out the brown-paper parcel); "there is not *one* of the boys—not even Bobby, whom, we always call so rough, who would have *dreamed* of letting a lady carry a parcel for herself, when he was by to take it. There! I am better now! I *had* to tell you; I wish you good-day!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"If he does not like it," say I, setting it on the floor, and regarding it from a little distance, with my head on one side, while friendly criticism and admiration meet in happy wedlock in my eyes, "I can give it to you; I had much rather make you a present than *him*."

"Then Heaven grant it may find disfavor in his sight!" says Sir Roger, piously.

We are talking of the traveling-bag, which at last, in despair of any thing suitable occurring to my mind, I have bought, and now regard with a sort of apprehensive joy. The blinds are half lowered for the heat, but, through them and under them, the broad gold sunshine is streaming and pushing itself, washing the careful twists of my flax hair, the bag's stout red leather sides, and Sir Roger's nose, as he leans over it, with manly distrust, trying the clasp by many searching snappings.

"I never gave you a present in my life—never—did I?" say I, squatting down on the floor beside him, crumpling my nice crisp muslin frock with the recklessness of a woman who knows that there are many more such frocks in the cupboard, and to whom this knowledge has but newly come; "never mind! next birthday I will give you one—a really nice, handsome, rather expensive one—all bought with your own money, too—there!"

This is on the morning of our last day in Dresden. Yes! *to-morrow* we set off homeward. Our wedding-tour is nearly ended: tyrant Custom, which sent us off, permits us to rejoin our fellows. Well, it really has not been so bad! I do not know that I should care to have it over again—that is, just immediately; but it has gone off very well altogether—quite as well as most other people's, I fancy. These are my thoughts in the afternoon, as (Sir Roger having gone to the post-office, and I having made myself very hot by superintending the packing of the presents—most of them of a brittle, *crackable* nature) I am leaning, to cool myself, over our balcony, and idly watching the little events that are happening under my nose. The omnibus stands, as usual, in the middle of the square, about to start for Blasewitz. Mysterious 'bus! always about to start—always full of patient passengers, and that yet was never seen by mortal man to set off. As I watch it with the wondering admiration with which I have daily regarded it, I hear the door of our sitting-room open, and Vick give a little shrewish shrill bark, speedily changed into an apologetic and friendly whiffling and whoffling.

"Is that you?" cry I, holding on by the balcony, and leaning back to peep over my own shoulder into the interior. "Come out here, if it is."

"Sir Roger is out," I say, a second later, putting my hand into that of Mr. Musgrave (for it is he), as he comes stepping, in his usual unsmiling, discontented beauty, to meet me.

"I know he is! I met him!"

"I am seeing the people start for Blasewitz for the last time! it makes me quite low!" I say, replacing my arms on the balcony, and speaking with an irrepressibly jovial broad smile on my face that rather contradicts my words.

"You *look* low," he answers, ironically, standing beside me, and looking rather provoked at my urbanity.

"This time to-morrow we shall be off," say I, beginning to laugh out of pure lightheartedness, though there is no joke within a mile of me, and to count on my fingers; "this time the day after to-morrow we shall be at Cologne—this time the day after *that* we shall be getting toward Brussels—this time the day after *that*, we shall be getting toward Dover—this time the day after *that*—"

"You will all be rushing higgledy-piggledy, helter-skelter, into each other's arms," interrupts my companion, looking at me with a lowering eye.

"Yes," say I, my eyes dancing. "You are quite right."

"Algy, and the Brat, and—what is the other fellow's name?—Dicky?—Jacky?—Jemmy?—"

"Bobby," say I, correcting him. "But you are not quite right; the Brat will not be there!—worse luck—he is in Paris!"

"Well, Barbara will not be in Paris," says the young man, still in the same discontented, pettish way. "*She* will be there, no doubt—well to the front—in the thickest of the osculations."

"*That* she will!" cry I, heartily. "But you must give up calling her Barbara; that is not at all pretty manners."

"We will make a bargain," he says, beginning to smile a little, but rather as if it were against his will and intention. "I will allow her to call me 'Frank,' if she will allow me to call her 'Barbara.'"

"I dare say you will" (laughing).

A little pause. Another person has got into the omnibus; it is growing extremely full.

"I *hate* last days," says my companion, hitting viciously at the iron balcony-rails with his stick, and scowling.

"'The Last Days of Pompeii,'" say I, stupidly, and yet laughing again; not because I think my witticism good, which no human being could do, but because I *must* laugh for very gladness. Another longer pause. (Shall I present the bag the night we arrive, or wait till next day?

"I have got a riddle to ask you," says Frank, abruptly, and firing the observation off somewhat like a bomb-shell.

"Have you?" say I, absently. "I hope it is a good one."

"Of course, *you* must judge of that—'*Mon premier*—'"

"It is in *French!*" cry I, with an accent of disgust.

"Well, why should not it be?" (rather tartly).

"No reason whatever, only that I warn you beforehand I shall not understand it: I always *shiver* when people tell me a French anecdote; I never know when the point has arrived; I always laugh too soon or too late."

He says nothing, but looks black.

"Go on!" say I, laughing. "We will try, if you like."

"*Mon—premier—est—le—premier—de tout*," he says, pronouncing each word very separately and distinctly. "Do you understand *that?*"

I nod. "My first is the first of all—yes."

"*Mon second n'a pas de second.*"

"My second has no second—yes."

"*Mon tout*"—(turning his long, sleepy eyes sentimentally toward me)—"*je ne saurai vous le dire.*"

"My whole—I cannot tell it you!—then why on earth did you ask me?" cry I, breaking out into hearty, wholesome laughter.

Again he blackens.

"Well, have you guessed it?"

"Guessed it!" I echo, recovering my gravity. "Not I!—my first is the first of all—my second has no second—my whole, I cannot tell it you!—I do not believe it is a riddle at all! it is a hoax—a take-in, like 'Why does a miller wear a white hat?'"

"It is nothing of the kind," he answers, looking thoroughly annoyed. "Must I tell you the answer?"

"I shall certainly never arrive at it by my unassisted genius," I reply, yawning. "Ah! there is M. Dom going out riding! Alas! never again shall I see him mount that peacocking steed!"

"It is 'Adieu!'" says my companion, blurting it out in a rage, seeing that I *will* not be interested in or excited by it.

"*Adieu!*" repeat I, standing with my mouth wide open, looking perfectly blank. "*How?*"

"You do not see?" he says. (His face has grown scarlet.) "Well, you must excuse me for saying that you are rather—" He breaks off and begins again, very fast this time. "My first is the first of all—is not *A* the first letter in the alphabet? My second has no second—has God (*Dieu*) any second? My whole—I cannot say it to you—*Adieu!*"

The contrast between the sentimentality of the words and the brusque and defiant anger of his tone is so abrupt that, I am sorry to say, I laugh again: indeed, I retire from the balcony into the saloon inside, throw myself into a chair, and, covering my face with my handkerchief, roar—

"It is very good," say I, in a choked voice; "very—so civil and pretty—but it is not very *funny*, is it?"

I receive no answer. I am still in my pocket-handkerchief, and he might be gone, but that I hear his quick, angry breathing, and know, by instinct, that he is standing over me, looking like a handsome thundercloud. I dare not look up at him, lest another mad cachinnation, such as sometimes overtakes one for the punishment of one's sins in church, should again lay violent hands upon me.

"I think I like 'Why was Balaam like a Life-Guardsman?' better, *on the whole*," I say, presently, peeping through my fingers, and

speaking with a suspicious tremble in my voice.

"I have no doubt it is far superior," he answers, in a fierce and sulky tone, that he in vain tries to make sound playful. "'*Balaam like a Life-Guardsman?*' and why was he, may I ask? Something humorous about his donkey, I suppose."

"Because he had a queer ass (cuirass)," reply I, again exploding, and hiding my face in the back of the chair.

"A *queer ass!*" (in a tone of the profoundest contempt); "you have no more sentiment in you than *this table!*" smiting it with his bare hand.

"I know I have not," say I, sitting up, and holding my hand to my side to ease the pain my excessive mirth has caused; "they always said so at home. Oh, here is the general! we will make *him* umpire, which is funniest, yours or mine!"

Sir Roger enters, and glances in some surprise from Frank's crimson face to my convulsed one.

"O general, do we not look as if we had been having an affecting parting?" cry I, jumping up and running to him. "Do not I look as if I had been crying? Quite the contrary, I assure you. But Musgrave and I have been asking each other such amusing riddles—would you like to hear them? *Mine* is good, plain, vulgar English, but his is French, so we will begin with *it*—'*Mon premier*—'"

I stop suddenly, for Mr. Musgrave is looking at me with an expression simply *murderous*.

"Well, what are you stopping for? I am on the horns of expectation—'*Mon premier*—'"

"After all, it is not so funny as I thought," I answer, brusquely. "I think we will keep it for some wet Sunday afternoon, when we are short of something to do."

CHAPTER XIV.

The day of departure has really come. We have eaten our last "bif-teck *aux pommes frites*," and drank our last cup of coffee in the Saxe. I have had my last look at the familiar square, at the great dome of the Frauen Kirchen, at the high houses with their dormer-windows, at the ugly big statue standing with its stiff black back rudely turned to the hotel, at the piled hay-carts. We are really and truly off. Our faces are set Barbara-ward, Bobby-ward, jackdaw-ward. I am in such rampaging spirits, that I literally do not know what to do with myself. I feel that I should like to tuck my tail, if I had one, between my legs, like Vick, and race round and round in an insane and unmeaning circle, as she does on the lawn at home, when oppressed by the overflow of her own gayety.

It seems to me as if there never had been such a day. I look at the sky as we drive along to the station. Call it sapphire, turquoise—indeed! What dull stone that ever lived darkling in a mine is fit to be named even in metaphor with this pale yet brilliant arch that so softly leans above us? It seems to me as if all the people we meet were handsome and well-featured—as if the Elbe were the noblest river that ever ran, carrying the sunlight in flakes of gold and diamond on its breast—as if all life were one long and kindly jest.

As we reach the station I see Mr. Musgrave standing on the pavement awaiting us, with a sort of mixed and compound look on his face.

"Here is Mr. Musgrave come to see us off!" I cry, jocundly. "Come to say '*Adieu!*' ha! ha! I must not forget to ask him whether he has any more riddles."

"For Heaven's sake do not!" cries Sir Roger, smiling in spite of himself, yet seriously and earnestly desirous of checking my wit. "Let the poor boy have a little peace! He no more understands chaff than I understand Parsee."

I hop out of the carriage like a parched pea, scorning equally the step and Frank's hand extended to help me. I feel to-day as if I need only stand on tiptoe, and stretch out my arms, in order to be able to fly.

"So you have come to see the last of us," I say, trying to pull a long face, and walking with him into the waiting-room.

"Yes; rather a mistake, is not it?" he says, somewhat gloomily, but loading himself at once, with ostentatious haste (in memory

of my former reproof), with my bag, parasol, and novel.

"The day after—the day after—the day after to-morrow," say I, smiling cheerfully up in his dismal face. "You may fancy us just turning in at the park-gates—by-the-by, have you any message to send to the boys, to Barbara?"

"None to the boys," he answers, half smiling, too. "I hate boys: you may give my love to Barbara if you like, and if you are quite sure that she is like the St. Catherine."

"Wait till you see her," say I, oracularly.

"But when *shall* I see her?" he asks, roused into an eagerness which I think promises admirably for Barbara; "when are you coming home, really?"

"Keep a good lookout at your lodge," I say, gayly, "and you will no doubt see us arrive some fine day, looking very foolish, most probably—crawling along like snails, dragged by our tenants."

"Were you *ever* known to answer a plain question plainly since you were born?" he cries, petulantly. "When are you likely to come *really?*"

"'I know not! What avails to know?'" reply I, pompously spouting a line out of some forgotten poem that has lurked in my memory, and now struts out, to the anger and discomfiture of Mr. Musgrave.

"Ah! here are the doors opening."

Everybody pours out on the platform, and into the empty and expectant train.

Sir Roger and I get into a carriage—*not* a *coupé* this time—and dispose our myriad parcels above our heads, under our feet. Trucks roll, and porters bawl past; luggage is violently shot into vans. The last belated, panting passenger has got in. The doors are slammed-to. Off we go! The train is already in motion when the young man jumps on the step and thrusts in his hand for one parting shake.

"*Mon tout,*" say, I, screwing up my face into a crying shape, and speaking in a squeaky, pseudo-tearful voice, "*je ne saurai vous le dire!*"

Then he is hustled off by an indignant guard and three porters, and we see him no more. I throw myself back into my corner, laughing.

"General," say I, "I think your young friend is nearly as soft-hearted as the girl in Tennyson who was

'Tender over drowning flies.'

He looked as if he were going to *weep*, did not he? and what on earth about?"

CHAPTER XV.

"How mother, when we used to stun
Her head wi' all our noisy fun,
Did wish us all a-gone from home;
But now that some be dead and some
Be gone, and, oh, the place is dumb,
How she do wish wi' useless tears
To have again about her ears
The voices that be gone!"

We have passed Cologne; have passed Brussels; have passed Calais and Dover; have passed London; we are drawing near home. How refreshing sounds the broad voice of the porters at Dover! Squeamish as I am, after an hour and three-quarters of a nice, short, chopping sea, the sight of the dear green-fustian jackets, instead of the slovenly blue blouses across-Channel, goes nigh to revive me. Adieu, O neatly aquiline, broad-shaved French faces! Welcome, O bearded Britons, with your rough-hewn noses!

To avoid the heat of the day, we go down from London by a late afternoon train. It is evening when, almost *before* the train has stopped, I insist on jumping out at our station. Imagine if through some accident we were carried on to the next by mistake!

Such a thing has never happened in the annals of history, but still it *might*.

Sir Roger has some considerable difficulty in hindering me from shaking hands with the whole staff of officials. One veteran porter, who has been here ever since I was born, has a polite but improbable trick of addressing *every* female passenger as "my lady." Well, with regard to *me*, at least, he is right now. I *am* "my lady." Ha! ha! I have not nearly got over the ridiculousness of this fact yet, though I have been in possession of it now these *four* whole weeks.

It has been a hot, parching summer day, and, now that the night draws on, all the flagging flowers in the cottage-borders are straightening themselves anew, and lifting their leaves to the dews. The pale bean-

flowers, in the broad bean-fields, as we pass, send their delicate scent over the hedge to me as if it were some fair and courteous speech. To me it seems as if they were saying, as plainly as may be, "Welcome home, Nancy!"

The sky that has been all of one hue during the live-long day—wherever you looked, nothing but pale, *pale* azure—is now like the palette of some God-painter, splashed and freaked with all manner of great and noble colors—a most regal blaze of gold—wide plains of crimson, as if all heaven were flashing at some high thought—little feathery cloud-islands of tenderest rose-pink. We are coming very near now. There, down below, set round its hips with tall rushes, is our pool, all blood-red in the sunset! Can *that* be colorless water—that great carmine fire? There are our elms, with their heads in the sunset, too.

"General," say I, very softly, putting my hand through his arm, and speaking in a small tone of unutterable content, "I should like to kiss everybody in the world."

"Perhaps you would not mind beginning with *me*," returns he, gayly; then—for I look quite capable of it—glancing slightly over his shoulder at the vigilant couple in the dickey.

"No, I did not mean *really*."

We are trotting alongside of the park-paling. I stand up and try to catch a glimpse, between the coachman and footman, of the gate, to see whether they have come to meet me.

We are slackening our speed; we are going to turn in; the lodge-keeper runs out to open the gate; but no, it is needless. It is already open. I could have told *her* that. Here they all are!—Barbara, Algy, Bobby, Tou Tou.

"Here they are!" cry I, in a fidgety rapture. "O general, just look how Tou Tou has grown; her frock is nearly up to her knees!"

"Do you think she *can* have grown that much in four weeks?" asks he, not contradictiously, but a little *doubtfully*, as Don Quixote may have asked the Princess Micomicona her reasons for landing at Ossime. "But pray, madam," says he, "why did your ladyship land at Ossime, seeing that it is not a seaport town?"

"I suppose not," I reply, a little disappointed. "I suppose that her frock must have run up in the washing."

To this day I have not the faintest idea how I got out of the carriage. My impression is that I *flew* over the side with wings which came to my aid in that one emergency, and then for evermore disappeared.

I do not know *this* time *where* I begin, or whom I end with. I seemed to be kissing them *all* at once. All their arms seem to be round *my* neck, and mine round all of theirs at the same moment. The only wonder is that, at the end of our greetings, we have a feature left among us. When at length they are ended—

"Well," say I, stupidly, with a long sigh of content, staring from one countenance to another, with a broad grin on my own. "Well!" and though I have been away *four* weeks, and been to foreign parts, and dined at *tables d'hôte* and seen Crucifixions and Madonnas, and seem to have more to tell than could be crowded into a closely-packed twelvemonth of talk, this is all I can find to say.

"Well," reply they, nor do they seem to be much richer in conversation than I.

Bobby is the first to regain the use of his tongue. He says, "My eye!" (oh, dear and familiar expletive, for a whole calendar month I have not heard you!)—"my eye! what a swell you are!"

Meanwhile Sir Roger stands aloof. If he *ever* thought of himself, he might be reasonably and equitably huffy at being so entirely neglected, for I will do them the justice to say that I think they have all utterly forgotten his existence: but, as he never does, I suppose he is not; at least there is only a friendly entertainment, and no hurt dignity, in the gentle strength of his face.

In the exuberance of my happiness, I have given him free leave to kiss Barbara and Tou Tou, but the poor man does not seem to be likely to have the chance.

"Are not you going to speak to the general?" I say, nudging Barbara. "You have never said 'How do you do?' to him."

Thus admonished, they recover their presence of mind and turn to salute him. There are no kissings, however, only some rather formal hand-shakings; and then Algy, as being possessed of the nearest approach to manners

of the family, walks on with him. The other three adhere to me.

"Well," say I, for the third time, holding Barbara by one hand, and resting the other on Bobby's stout arm, dressed in cricketing-flannel, while Tou Tou *backs* before us with easy grace. "Well, and how is everybody? How is mother?"

"She is all right!"

"And HE? Is anybody in disgrace now? At least of course *somebody* is, but *who?*"

"*In disgrace!*" cries Bobby, briskly. "Bless your heart, no! we are

'Like the young lambs,
A sporting about by the side of their dams.'

In disgrace, indeed! we are 'Barbara, child,' and 'Algy, my dear fellow,' and 'Bobby, love!'"

"*Bobby!*" cries Tou Tou, in a high key of indignation at this monstrously palpable instance of unveracity, and nearly capsizing, as she speaks, into a rabbit-hole, which, in her backward progress—we are crossing the park—she has not perceived.

"Well," replies Bobby, candidly, "that last yarn may not be *quite* a fact, I own *that;* but I appeal to *you*, Barbara, is not it true, *i' the main?* Are not we all 'good fellows,' and 'dear boys?'"

"I am thankful to say that we are," replies Barbara, laughing; "but how long we shall remain so is quite another thing."

"I have brought a present for him," say I, rather nervously; "do you think he will be pleased?"

"He will say that he very much regrets that you should have taken the trouble to waste your money upon *him*, as he did last birthday, when we exerted ourselves to lay out ten shillings and sixpence on that spectacle-case," answers Bobby, cheerfully.

"But what is it?"

"What is it?" cry Barbara and Tou Tou in a breath.

"It is a—a *traveling-bag*," reply I, with a little hesitation, looking imploringly from Barbara to Bobby. "Do you think he will like it?"

"*A traveling-bag!*" echoes Bobby; then, a little bluntly, "but he never travels!"

"No more he does!" reply I, feeling a good deal crestfallen. "I thought of that myself; it was not quite my own idea—it was the general's suggestion!"

"The general!" says Bobby, "whew—w!" (with a long whistle of intelligence)—"well, *he* ought to know what he likes and dislikes, ought not he? He ought to understand his tastes, being the same age, and having been at schoo—"

"Look!" cry I, hastily, breaking into the midst of these soothing facts, which are daily becoming more distasteful to me, and pointing to the windows of the house, which are all blazing in the sunset, each pane sending forth a sheaf of fire, as if some great and mighty feast were being held within. "I see you are having an illumination in honor of us."

"Yes," answers Bobby, kindly entering into my humor, "and the reason why father did not come to meet you at the gate was that he was busy lighting the candles."

My spirits are so dashed by the more implied than expressed disapproval of my brethren, that I resolve to defer the presentation of the bag till to-morrow, or perhaps—to-morrow being Sunday, always rather a dark day in the paternal calendar—till Monday.

Dinner is over, and, as it is clearly impossible to stay in-doors on such a night, we are all out again. The three elders—father, mother, and husband—sitting sedately on three rustic chairs on the dry gravel-walk, and we young ones lying about in different attitudes of restful ease, on rugs and cloaks that we have spread upon the dewy grass. We are not far off from the others, but just so far as that our talk should be out of ear-shot. In my own mind, I am not aware that Sir Roger would far rather be with *us*, listening to our quick gabble, and laughing with us at our threadbare jests, which are rewarded with mirth so disproportioned to their size, than interchanging sober talk with the friend of his infancy. Once or twice I see his gray eyes straying a little wistfully toward us, but he makes no slightest movement toward joining us. I should like, if I had my own way, to ask him to come to us, to ask him to sit on the rugs and make jokes too, but some sort of false shame, some sneaky shyness before the boys, hinders me. I am leaning my elbow on the soft fur of the rug, and my head on my hand, and am staring up at the stars, cool and throbbing, so like little stiletto-holes

pricked in heaven's floor, as they steal out in systems and constellations on the night.

"There is dear old Charles Wain," say I, affectionately; "I never knew where to look for him in Dresden; *how* nice it is to be home again!"

"Nancy!" says Algy, gravely, "do you know I have counted, and that is the *sixteenth* time that you have made that ejaculation since your arrival! Do you know—I am sorry to have to say it—that it sounds as if you had not enjoyed your honey-moon very much?"

"It sounds quite wrong, then," cry I, coming down from the stars, and speaking rather sharply. "I enjoyed it immensely; yes, *immensely!*"

I say this with an emphasis which is calculated to convince not only everybody else, but even myself.

"Come, now," cries Bobby, who is farthest off from me, and, to remedy this disadvantage, begins to travel quickly, in a sitting posture, along the rugs toward me, "tell the truth—*gospel* truth, mind!—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Would you like to be setting off on it over again, to-morrow morning?"

"Of course not," reply I, angrily; "what a silly question! Would *any one* like to begin *any thing* over again, just the very minute that they had finished it? You might as well ask me would I like to have dinner over again, and begin upon a fresh plate of soup."

No one is convinced.

"When *I* marry," continues Bobby, lying flat on his back, with his hands clasped under his head (we all laugh)—"when *I* marry, no one shall succeed in packing *me* off to foreign parts with my young woman. I shall take her straight home, as if I was not ashamed of her, and we will have a *dance*, and make a clean sweep of our own cake."

"Nancy!" cries Tou Tou, innocently, joining in the conversation for the first time, "*did* any one take him for your *grandfather*, as the Brat said they would?"

"Of course not!" cry I, crossly, making a spiteful lunge, as I speak, at a *startle-de-buz*, which has lumbered booming into my face. "Who on earth supposed they would *really?*"

Tou Tou collapses, with a hazy impression of having been snubbed, and there is a moment's silence. A faint, fire-like flush still lingers in the west—all that is left of the dazzling pageant that the heavens sent to welcome me home. I am looking toward it—away from my brothers and sisters—away from everybody—across the indistinct garden-beds—across the misty park, and the dark tree-tops, when a voice suddenly brings me back.

"Nancy, child!" it says, "is not it rather damp for you? Would you mind putting *this* on?"

I look up in a hurry, and see Sir Roger stooping over me, with an outspread cloak in his hands.

"Oh, thank you!" cry I, hurriedly, reddening—I do not quite know why—and with that same sort of sneaky feeling, as if the boys were laughing; "I am not one much apt to catch cold—none of us are—but I will, if you like."

So saying, I draw it round my shoulders. Then he goes, *in a minute*, without a second's lingering, back to the gravel-walk, to his wicker-chair, to grave, dry talk to the friend of his infancy! I have an uncomfortable feeling that there is a silent and hidden laugh among the family.

"Barbara, my treasure!" says Algy, presently, in a mocking voice, "*might* I be allowed to offer you our umbrella and a pair of goloshes, to defend you from the evening dews?"

"Hush!" cries Barbara, gently pushing him away, and stretching out her hand to me. She is the only one that understands. (Oh, why, *why* did I ever laugh at him with them? What is there to laugh at in him?)

"My poor Barbara!" continues Algy, in a tone of affected solicitude. "If you had not a tender brother to look after you, your young limbs might be cramped with rheumatism, and twitched with palsy, before any one would think of bringing *you* a cloak."

"Wait a bit!" say I, recovering my good-humor with an effort, reflecting that it is no use to be vexed—that they *mean* nothing—and that, lastly, *I have brought it on myself!*

"Wait for *what?*" asks Barbara, laughing. "Till Toothless Jack has grown used to his new teeth?"

"By-the-by," cries Bobby, eagerly, "that was since you went away, Nancy: he has set

up a stock of *new* teeth—*beauties*—like Orient pearl—he wore them in church last Sunday for the first time. We tell Barbara that he has bought them on purpose to propose in. Now, do not you think it looks *promising?*"

"We do not mean, however," says Algy, lighting a cigar, "to let Barbara go *cheap!* Now that we have disposed of you so advantageously, we are beginning to be rather ambitious even for *Tou Tou.*"

"We think," says Bobby, giving a friendly but severe pull to our younger sister's outspread yellow locks, "that Tou Tou would adorn the *Church.* Bishops have mostly *thin* legs, so it is to be presumed that they admire them: we destine Tou Tou for a bishop's lady!"

Hereupon follows a lively fire of argument between Bobby and his sister; she protesting that she will *not* espouse a bishop, and he asseverating that she shall. It lasts the best part of a quarter of an hour, and ends by reducing Tou Tou to tears.

"But come," says Algy, taking his cigar out of his mouth, throwing his head back, and blowing two columns of smoke out of his nose, "let us take up our subject again where we dropped it. I should be really glad if I could get you to own that you and *he*"—(indicating my husband by a jerk of his head)—"grew rather sick of each other! Whether you own it or not, I know you *did;* and it would give me pleasure to hear it. You need not take it personally. I assure you that it is no slur upon him—*everybody* does. I have talked to lots of fellows who have gone through it, and they all say the same."

"Nancy!" says Bobby, abandoning, at length, his persecution of Tou Tou, and pretending not to hear her last persevering assertion of her determination not to be episcopally wed—"tell the truth, and shame the devil. It would be different if we were strangers, but *we* that have sported with you since you wore frilled trousers and a bib—come now—did you, or did you not, kneel three times a day, like the prophet Daniel, looking eastward or westward, or whichever way it *did* look, and yearn for us, and Jacky, and the bun-loaf—come, now?"

"Well, yes," say I, reluctantly making the admission. "I do not say that I did not! Of course, after having been used to you all my life, it would have been very odd if I had not missed you rather badly; but that is a very different thing from being *sick of him!*"

"Well, we will not say *sick*," returns Algy, with the air of one who is making a handsome concession; "it is a disagreeable, bilious expression, but it would be useless to try and convince me that *any* human affection could stand the wear and tear of twenty-eight whole days of an absolute duet and not be rather the worse for it!"

"But it was *not* an absolute duet," cry I, raising my voice a little, and speaking with some excitement; "you are talking about what you do not know! you are quite wrong."

"Well, it is not the first time in my life that I have been that," he says, philosophically; "but come—who did you the Christian office of interrupting it? tell us."

"I told you in my letters," say I, rather petulantly. "I certainly mentioned—yes, I know I did—we happened at Dresden to fall in with a friend of the general's—at least, a person he knew."

"A person he knew? What kind of a person? Man or woman?"

"Man."

"Old or young?"

"Young."

"Ugly or pretty?"

"Pretty," answer I, laughing. "Ah! what a rage he would be in if he could hear such an epithet applied to him!"

"A young, well-looking, man-friend!" says Algy, slowly recapitulating all my admissions as he lies gently puffing on the rug beside me. "Well?"

"*Well!*" echo I, rather snappishly. "Nothing! only that I wanted to show you that it was not quite such a *duet* as you imagined! Of course—Dresden is not a big place—of course we met very often, and went here and there together."

"And where was Sir Roger meanwhile?"

"Sir Roger was there, too, of course," reply I, still a little crossly, "except once or twice—certainly not more than twice—he said he did not feel inclined to come, and so we went without him."

"You left him at home, in fact!" says Algy, with a rather malicious smile, "out of harm's way, while you and the young friend

marauded about the town together; it must have been very lively for him, poor man! Oh, fie! Nancy, fie!"

"We did not do any thing of the kind," cry I, now thoroughly vexed and uncomfortable. "I wish you would not misunderstand things on purpose! there is not any fun in it! *Both* times I *wanted* him to come! I *asked* him particularly!"

"And, if I may make so bold as to inquire," asks Bobby, striking in, "how did the young friend call himself? What was his name?"

"Musgrave," reply I, shortly. "Frank Musgrave!" for the stream of my conversation seems dried.

"Was he *nice?* Should *we* like him?" asks Tou Tou, who has recovered her equanimity, dried her tears, and forgotten the bishop.

"He was nice *to look at!*" reply I, cautiously.

"That is a very different thing!" says Barbara, laughing. "But was he nice in himself?"

I reflect.

"No," say I, "I do not think he was: at least, he wanted a great deal of alteration."

"As I have no doubt that you told him," says Algy, with a smile.

"I dare say I did," reply I, distantly, for I am not pleased with Algy.

A little pause.

"I think he *was* nice, too, *in a way*," say I, rather compunctiously. "I used to tell him about all of you, and—I dare say it was pretense—but he *seemed* to like to hear about you! When I came away, he sent his love to Barbara; he would not send any messages to you boys—he said he hated boys!"

"Humph!"

Another short silence. The elders have gone in to tea. Through the windows, I see the lamp-light shining on the tea-cups.

"Algy!" say I, in a rather low voice, edging a little nearer to where he lies gracefully outspread, "you did not mean it, *really?* You do not think I—I—I—*neglected* the general, do you?—you do not think I—I—*liked* to be away from him?"

"My lady!" replies he, teasingly, "I *think* nothing! I only know what your ladyship was good enough to tell me!"

Then we all get up, shoulder our rugs, and walk in.

CHAPTER XVI.

WELL, no one will deny that Sunday comes after Saturday; and it was Saturday evening, when the heavens painted themselves with fire, and the sun lit up all the house-windows to welcome us home. Sunday is not usually one of our blandest days, but we must hope for the best.

"General," say I, standing before him, dressed for morning church, after having previously turned slowly round on the point of my toes, to favor him with the back view of as delightful a bonnet, and as airily fresh and fine a muslin gown, as ever young woman said her prayers in—"by-the-by, do you like my calling you general?"

"At least I understand what you mean by it," he says, a little evasively; "which, after all, is the great thing, is not it?"

"It is my own invention," say I, rather proudly; "nobody put it into my head, and nobody else calls you by it, do they?"

"Not now."

"*Not now?*" cry I, surprised; "but did they ever?"

"Yes," he says, "for about a year, most people did; I was a general a year before my brother died."

"*Your brother died?*" cry I, again repeating his words, and arching my eyebrows, which have not naturally the slightest tendency toward describing a semicircle. "What! *you* had a brother, too, had you? I never knew that before."

"Did you think *you* had a monopoly of them?" laughing a little.

"So you were not 'Sir' always?"

"No more than *you* are," he answers, smiling. "No, I was not born in the purple; for thirty-seven years of my life I earned my own bread—and rather dry bread too."

"You do not say so!" cry I, in some astonishment.

"If I had come here seven years ago," he says, taking both my pale yellow hands in his light gray ones, and looking at me with eyes which seem darker and deeper than usual under the shade of the brim of his tall hat—

"by-the-by, you would have been a little girl then—as little as Tou Tou—"

"Yes," interrupt I, breaking in hastily; "but, indeed, I never was a bit like her, never. I *never* had such legs—ask the boys if I had!"

"I did not suppose that you had," he answers, bursting into a hearty and most unfeigned laugh; "but" (growing grave again), "Nancy, suppose that I had come here then! I should have had no shooting to offer the boys—no horses to mount Algy—no house worth asking Barbara to—"

"No more you would!" say I, too much impressed with surprise at this new light on Sir Roger's past life to notice the sort of wistfulness and inquiry that lurks in his last words; then, after a second, perceiving it: "And you think," say I, loosing my hands from his, and growing as pink as the delicate China rose-bud that is peeping round the corner of the trellis in at the window, "that there would not have been as much inducement *then* for me to propose to you, as there was in the present state of things!"

I am laughing awkwardly as I speak; then, eagerly changing the conversation, and rushing into another subject: "By-the-by, I had something to say to you—something quite important before we digressed."

"Yes?"

"O general!" taking hold of the lapel of his coat, and looking up at him with appealing earnestness, "do you know that I have made up my mind to give *him* the *bag* to-day! it is no use putting off the evil day—it *must* come, after supper; they all say *after supper!*"

"Yes?"

"Well, I want you to talk to him *all day*, and get him into a good-humor by then, if you can, that is all!"

"*That is all!*" repeats my husband, with the slightest possible ironical accent. Then we go to church. It is too near to drive, so we all walk. The church-yard elms are out in fullest leaf above our heads. There are so many leaves, and they are so close together, that they hide the great brown rooks' nests. They do not hide the rooks themselves. It would take a good deal to do that. Dear pleasant-spoken rooks, talking so loudly and irreverently about their own secular themes—out-cawing the church-bells, as we pace by, devout and smart, to our prayers. Last time I walked up this path, it was hidden with red cloth, and flowers were tumbling under my feet. Ah! red cloth comes but once in a lifetime. It is only the queen who lives in an atmosphere of red cloth and cut flowers.

We are in church now. The service is in progress. Can it be only *five* Sundays ago that I was standing here as I am now, watching all the little well-known incidents? Father standing up in frock-coat and spectacles, keeping a sharp lookout over the top of his prayer-book, to see *how* late the servants are. The ill-behaved charity-boys emulously trying who shall make the hind-legs of his chair squeak the loudest on the stone floor. Toothless Jack leering distantly at Barbara from the side aisle. Something apparently is amusing him. He is smiling a little. I see his teeth. They, at least, are new. *They* were not here five weeks ago. The little starved curate—the one who tore his gloves into strips—loses his place in the second lesson, and madly plunges at three different wrong verses in succession, before he regains the thread of his narrative.

We have come to the sermon. The text is, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." No sooner is it given out than Algy, Bobby, and Tou Tou, all look at me and grin; but father, who has a wily way of establishing himself in the corner of the pew, so as to have a bird's-eye view of all our demeanors, speedily frowns them down into a preternatural gravity. Ah, why *to-day*, of all days, did they laugh? and why *to-day*, of all days, did the serants file noisily in, numerous and out of breath, in the middle of the psalms? I tremble when I think of the bag.

Well, who will may laugh again now: we are out in the sunshine, with the church-yard grass bowing and swaying in the wind, and the little cloud-shadows flying across the half-effaced names of the forgotten dead, who lie under their lichen-grown tombs.

"Did you see his *teeth?*" asks Tou Tou, joining me with a leap, almost before I am outside the church-porch.

"They are not comfortable yet," remarks Bobby, gravely, as he walks beside me carrying my prayer-book. "I could see that: he was taking them out, and putting them in again with his tongue all through the Litany."

"When once he has secured Barbara, I expect that they will go back with the box for good and all—eh, Barbara?" say I, laughing as I speak; but Barbara is out of ear-shot. She is lingering behind to shake hands with the curate, and ask all the poor old people after their diseases. *I* never can recollect clearly *who* has *what*. I always apportion the rheumatism wrongly, but *she* never does. There she stands just by the church-gate, with the little sunny lights running up and down upon her snow-white gown, shaking each grimy old hand with a kind and friendly equality.

The day rolls by; afternoon service; walk round the grounds; early dinner (we always embitter our lives on Sundays by dining at *six*, which does the servants no good, and sours the tempers of the whole family); then prayers. Prayers are always immediately followed by that light refection which we call supper.

As the time approaches, my heart sinks imperceptibly lower in my system than the place where it usually resides.

> "Be ready, Sister Nancy,
> For the time is drawing nigh,"

says Algy, solemnly putting his arm round my shoulders, as, the prayer-bell having rung, we set off for the wonted justicing-room.

"Have a pull at my flask," suggests Bobby, seriously; "there is some cognac left in it since the day we fished the pool. It would do you all the good in the world, and, if you took *enough*, you would feel able to give him *ten* bags, or, indeed, throw them at his head at a pinch."

"Have you got it?" say I, faintly, to the general, who at this moment joins us.

"Yes, here it is."

"But what will you do with it *meanwhile?*" cry I, anxiously; "he must not see it *first*."

"Sit upon it," suggests Algy, flippantly.

"Hang it round his neck while he is at prayers," bursts out Bobby, with the air of a person who has had an illumination; "you know he always pretends to have his eyes shut."

"And at 'Amen' he would awake to find himself famous," says Algy, pseudo-pompously.

But this suggestion, although I cannot help looking upon it as ingenious, I do not adopt.

Prayers on Sunday are a much *finer* and larger ceremonial than they are on week-days. In the first place, instead of a few of the church prayers quickly pattered, which are ended in five minutes, we have a whole long sermon, which lasts twenty. In the second place, the congregation is so much greater. On week-days it is only the in-door servants; on Sundays it is the whole staff—coachman, grooms, stablemen. I think myself that it is more in the nature of a *parade*, to insure that none of the establishment are out *sweetheart-ing*, than of a religious exercise. Usually I am delighted when the sermon is ended. Even Barrow or Jeremy Taylor would sound dull and stale if fired off in a flat, fierce monotone, without emphasis or modulation. To-night, at every page that turns, my heart declines lower and lower down. It is ended now; so is the short prayer that follows it. We all rise, and father stands with his hawk-eyes fixed on the servants, as they march out, *counting* them. The upper servants are all right; so are the housemaids, cookmaids, and lesser scullions. Alas! alas! there is a helper wanting.

Having listened to and *dis*believed the explanation of his absence, father leads the way into supper, but the little incident has taken the bloom off his suavity.

Sir Roger has deposited the bag—still wrapped in its paper coverings—on a chair, in a modest and unobtrusive corner of the dining-room, ready for presentation. He did this just before prayers. As we enter the room, father's eyes fall on it.

"What is *that?*" he cries, pointing with his forefinger, and turning severely to the boys. "How many times have I told you that I will not have parcels left about, littering the whole place? Off with it!"

"If you please, father," say I, in a very small and starved voice, "it is not the boys', it is *mine*."

"*Yours*, is it?" with a sudden change of tone, and return to amenity. "Oh, all right!" (Then, with a little accent of sudden jocosity) —"One of your foreign purchases, eh?"

We sit round the snowy table, in the pleasant light of the shaded lamps, eating chicken-salad, and abasing and rifling the

great red pyramids of strawberries and raspberries, but talking not much. We young ones never *can* talk out loud before father. He has never heard our voices raised much above a whisper. I do not think he has an idea what fine, loud Billingsgate voices his children *really* have. He has said grace—we always have a longer, *gratefuller* grace than usual on Sundays—and has risen to go.

"Now for it!" cries Bobby, wildly excited, and giving me an awful dig in the ribs with his elbow.

"Shall I get it?" asks the general, in an encouraging whisper. "Cheer up, Nancy, do not look so *white!* it is all right."

He rises and fetches it, slips it quickly out of its coverings, and puts it into my hand. Father has reached the door, I run after him.

"Father!" cry I, in a choked and trembling voice. "Stop!"

He turns with the handle in his grasp, and looks at me in some surprise.

"Father!" cry I, beginning again, and holding my gift out nervously toward him, "here's—here's—here's a *bag!*"

This is my address of presentation. I hear the boys tittering at the table behind me—a sound which, telling me how ill I am speeding, makes my confusion tenfold worse. I murmur, helplessly and indistinctly, something about his never traveling, and my knowing that fact—and having been always sure that he would hate it—and then I glance helplessly round with a wild idea of flight. But at the same moment an arm of friendly strength comes round my shoulders—a friendly voice sounds in my buzzing ears.

"James," it says, simply and directly, "she has brought you a present, and she is afraid that you will not care about it."

"A *present!*" echoes my father, the meaning of the inexplicable object which has suddenly been thrust into his grasp beginning to dawn upon him. "Oh, I see! I am sure, my dear Nancy"— with a sort of embarrassed stiffness that yet means to be gracious—"that I am extremely obliged to you, extremely; and though I regret that you should have wasted your money on me—yet—yet—I assure you, I shall always prize it very highly."

Then he goes out rather hastily. I return to the supper-table.

"Shake hands!" cries Algy, pouring me out a glass of claret. "*Now*, perhaps, you have some faint idea of what *I* felt when I had to return thanks for the bridesmaids."

"Nancy!" cries Bobby, holding out the fruit to which he alludes, and speaking in a wobbly, quivering voice, with a painfully *literal* imitation of my late address, "here's—here's—here's a *peach!*"

But I am burying my face in Sir Roger's shoulder, like a shy child.

"I *like* you!" I say, creeping up quite close to him. "You were the only one that came to help me. If it had not been for *you*, I should be there still!"

CHAPTER XVII.

The bag-affair is quite an old one now—a fortnight old. The bag itself has, I believe, retired into the decent privacy of a cupboard, nor is it much more likely to reissue thence than was one of the frail nuns built into the wall in the old times likely to come stepping out again. Bobby has at length ceased to offer me every object which it devolves upon him to hand me, with a quavering voice and a prolonged stammer, since, though I was at first excellently vulnerable by this weapon of offense, I am now becoming *hornily* hard and indifferent to it. We have stepped over the boundaries of June into July.

Yes, June has gone to look for all its dead brothers, wherever—since they say nothing is ever really lost—they lie with their stored sweets. To me, this has been as merry and good a June as any one of my nineteen.

Sir Roger is beginning to talk of going home—*his* home, that is—but rather diffidently and tentatively, as if not quite sure whether the proposal will meet with favor in my eyes. He need not be nervous on this point. I, too, am rather anxious and eager to see my house—*my* house, if you please!—I, who have never hitherto possessed any larger residence than a doll's house, whose whole front wall opened at once, giving one an improbably simultaneous view of kitchen-range, best four-poster, and drawing-room chairs. I have, it is true, seen photographs of my new house, photographs of its east front, of its west front—

photographs, in its park, of the great old cedar; in its gardens, of its woody pool—but, to tell you the truth, I want to see *it*. I have already planned a house-warming, and invited them all to it, a house-warming in which—oh, absurd!—*I* shall sit at the head of the table, and father and mother only at the sides—*I* shall tell the people who they are to take in to dinner, and nod my head from the top when dessert is ended.

To-day I am going to write and secure the Brat's company—that is, later in the day—but now it is quite, *quite* early, even the letters have not come in. We have all—viz., the boys, the girls, and I—risen (in pursuance of a plan made overnight) preternaturally early, almost as early as I did on my wedding-morning, and are going out to gather mushrooms in the meadow, by the river. Indignation against the inhabitants of the neighboring town is what has torn us from our morning dreams, the greedy townsfolk, by whom, on every previous occasion, we have found our meadow rifled before we could reach it. To-day we shall, at least, meet them on equal terms. We are all rather gapy at first, more especially Algy, who has deferred the making of the greater part of his toilet till his return, looks dishevelled, and sounds grumbling. But before long both gapes and grumbles depart.

Who would see the day when he is old, and stale, and shabby, when, like us, they could come out to meet him as he walks across the meadow with a mantle of dew wrapped round him, and a garland of paling rose-clouds, that an hour ago were crimson, about his head?

The place toward which we tend is at some little distance, and our road thither leads through all manner of comely rustic places, flowered fields, where the buttercups crowd their little varnished cups, and the vigilant ox-eyes are already wakefully staring up from among the grass-spears; a little wood; a deep and ruddy-colored lane, along whose unpruned hedges straggle the riches of the wild-rose, most delicately flushed, as if God in passing had called her very good, and she had reddened at his praise; where the honey-suckle, too, is holding stilly aloft the open cream-colored trumpets and closed red trumpet-buds of her heaven-sweet crown.

In an instant Tou Tou is scrawling and scrambling like a great spider up the steep bank; in an instant more she is tugging, tearing, devastating; while the faint petals that no mightiest king can restore, but that any infant with a touch can destroy, are showering in scented ruin around her. It gives me a pain to see it, as if I saw some sentient thing in agony. I think I feel, with Walter Savage Landor:

> "I never pluck the rose; the violet's head
> Hath shaken with my breath upon its bank
> And not reproached me: the ever-sacred cup
> Of the pure lily hath between my hands
> Felt safe, unsoiled, nor lost one grain of gold."

"You will have your basket filled before we get there," I say, remonstrating, but she does not heed me.

Hot and scratched—at least I am glad that in their death-pain they were able to scratch her—she still tugs and mauls. I walk on. We reach the meadow. Well, at least *to-day* we are in time. It has the silence and solitude of the dawn of Creation's first still day, broken only by the sheep that are cropping

> "The slant grass, and daisies pale."

The slow, smooth river washes by, sucking in among the rushes. Our footsteps show plainly shaped as we step along through the hoary dew. We separate—going one this way, one that—and, in silence and gravity, pace with bent heads and down-turned eyes through the fine, short grass. Excitement and emulation keep us dumb, for let who will—*blasé* and used up—deny it, but there is an excitement, wholesome and hearty, in *seeking*, and a joy pure and unadulterated in finding, mushrooms in a probable field in the hopeful morning; whether the mushroom be a patriarch whose gills are browned with age, and who is big enough to be an umbrella for the fairy people, or a little milk-white button, half hidden in daisies and trefoil. Sometimes a cry of rage and anguish bursts from one or other of us who has been the dupe of a puff-ball family, and who is satiating his or her revenge by stamping on the deceiver's head, and reducing its fair, round proportions to a flat and fleshy pulp. We search long and diligently, and our efforts are blessed with an unwonted success. By the time that the sun has attained height enough in the heavens to make his power tyrannically felt, our baskets

are filled. Tou Tou has to throw away her wild-roses, limp and flaccid, into the dust of the lane. We walk home, singing and making poor jokes, as is our wont. As we draw near the house with joyful foretastes of breakfast in our minds, with redly-flushed cheeks and merry eyes, I see Sir Roger leaning on the stone balustrade of the terrace, looking as if he were watching for us, and, indeed, no sooner does he catch sight of us, than he comes toward us.

"Do you like mushrooms?" cry I, at the top of my voice, long before I have reached him, holding up my basket triumphantly. "See, I have got the most of anybody except Tou Tou!"

I have met him by the end of this sentence.

"Do you like mushrooms?" I repeat, lifting the lid, and giving him a peep into the creamy and pink-colored treasures inside, "oh you *must!* if you do not, I shall have a *divorce!* I could not bear a difference of opinion upon such a subject."

I have never given him time to speak, and now I look with appealing laughter into his silent face.

"Why, what is the matter?" I cry, with an abrupt change of tone. "What has happened? How odd you look!"

"Nothing has happened," he answers, trying to smile, but I see that it is quite against the grain, "only that I have had some not very pleasant news."

"It is not any thing about—about the *Brat!*" cry I, stopping suddenly, seizing his arm with both hands, and turning, as I feel, extremely pale, while my thoughts fly to the only one of my beloveds that is out of my sight.

"About the *Brat!*" he echoes in surprise, "oh, dear no! nothing!"

"Then I do not much care *who* is dead?" I answer, unfeelingly, drawing a long breath; "he is the only person *out* of this house whose death would afflict me much, and I do not think that there is any one besides *us* that *you* are very devoted to, is there?"

"Why are you so determined that some one is *dead?*" he asks, smiling again, but this time more naturally; "is there nothing vexatious in the world but *death?*"

"Yes," say I, laughing, despite myself, as my thoughts revert to my late employment, "there are *puff-balls!*"—then, ashamed of having been flippant, and afraid of having been unsympathetic, I add hastily: "I wish you would tell me what it is; I am sure, *when I hear*, I shall be vexed too; but, you see, as long as I do not know what it is, I cannot, can I?"

"There is no time now," he says, glancing toward father, whose head appears through the dining-room windows. "See! they are going to breakfast!—afterward I will tell you—afterward—and child—" (putting his hands on my shoulders, and essaying to look at me with an altogether cheered and careless face), "do not you worry your head about it!—eat your breakfast with an easy mind; after all, it is nothing very bad!—it could not be any thing *very* bad, as long as—." He stops abruptly, and adds hastily, "let us have a look at your mushrooms! well, you *have* a quantity!"

"Yes, have not I?" say I, triumphantly, "more than any of them, except Tou Tou—." Then, not quite satisfied with the impression our late talk has left upon me: "General!" say I, lowering my face and reddening, "I hope you do not think that I am *quite* a baby because I like childish things—gathering mushrooms—running about with the boys—talking to Jacky. I can understand serious things *too*, I assure you. I think I could enter into your trouble—I think, if you gave me the chance, that you would find that I could!"

Then a sort of idiotic false shame overtakes me, and without waiting for his answer I disappear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I MEET Bobby retiring to the kitchen to cook his mushrooms himself. He invites me to join him, but I refuse. It is the first time in the annals of history that I was ever known to say no to such an offer. Bobby regards me with reproachful anger, and makes a muffled remark, the drift of which I understand to be that, though I may *pretend* not to be, I *am* grown fine, as he always said I should. To-day it seems to me as if breakfast would *never* end. It is one of our fixed laws that no one shall leave the table until father gives the

signal by saying grace. Sometimes, when he is in one of his unfortunate moods, he keeps us all staring at our empty cups and platters for half an hour. To-day I watch with warm anxiety the progress downward of the tea in his cup. At last he has come to the grounds. He lays down the *Times*. We all joyfully half bow our heads, in expectation of the wonted "For what we have received," etc., but speedily and disappointedly raise them again.

"Jane, can you spare me another cup?" and reburies himself in a long leader. Behind the shelter of the great sheet, I make a hideous contortion across the table at Sir Roger, who has fallen with great docility into our ways, and is looking back at me now with that gentle, steadfast serenity, which is the leading characteristic of his face, but which this morning is, I cannot help thinking, a good deal disturbed, hard as he is trying to hide it. There are, thank Heaven, no more false starts. Next time that he lays down the paper, we are all afraid to bend our heads, for fear that the movement shall break the charm, and induce him to send for a fourth cup—he has already had *three*—but no! release has come at last.

"For what we have received, the Lord make us truly thankful!"

Almost before we have reached "thankful," there is a noise of several chairs pushed back. Before you could say "knife!" we are all out of the room. All but Sir Roger! In deference, I suppose, to the feelings of the friend of his infancy, and not to appear *too* anxious to leave him—Sir Roger ought to have married Barbara, they two are always thinking of other people's feelings—he delays a little, and indeed they emerge together and find me sitting on one of the uncomfortable, stiff hall-chairs, on which nobody ever sits. To my dismay, I hear father say something about the chestnut colt's legs, and I know that another delay is in store for me. Sir Roger comes over to me, and takes his wide-awake from the stand beside me.

"We are going to the stables," he says, patting my shoulder.

I make a second hideous face. Often have I been complimented by the boys, on the flexibility of my features.

"I shall be back in ten minutes," he says, in a low voice; "will you wait for me in the morning-room?"

"I suppose I must," say I, reluctantly, with a disgusted and disappointed drawing down of the corners of my mouth.

Ten minutes pass; twenty, five-and-twenty! Still he has not come back. I walk up and down the room; I look out of window at the gardeners rolling the grass; I rend a large and comely rose into tatters, while all manner of unpleasant possibilities stalk along in order before my mind's eye. Perhaps Tempest is burned down. Perhaps some bank, in which he has put all his money, has broken. Perhaps he has found out that his brother is not *really* dead after all! I dismiss this last *worst* suggestion as improbable. The door opens, and he enters.

"Here you are!" I cry, making a joyous rush at him. "I thought you were never coming! Please, is *that* your idea of ten minutes?"

"I could not help it," he answers; "he kept me talking; I could not get away any sooner."

"Why did you go?" say I, dutifully. "Why did not you say, when he asked you, 'No, I will not?' He would have done it to you as soon as look at you."

"That would have been so polite to one's host and father-in-law, would not it?" he answers, a little ironically. "After all, Nancy, where is the use of vexing people for nothing?"

"Not *people* generally," reply I, still chafed; "but I *should* like some one who was not his child, and in whom it would not be disrespectful, to pay him out for keeping us all as he did this morning; he knew as well as possible that we were dying to be off; *that* was why he had that last cup: he did not *want* it any more than I did. He did not drink it; did not you see? he left three-quarters of it."

Sir Roger does not answer, unless a slight shrug and a passing his hand across his face with a rather dispirited gesture be an answer. I feel ashamed of my petulance.

"Do you feel inclined to tell me about your ill news?" I say, gently, going over to him, and putting my hand on his shoulder. "I have been making so many guesses as to what it can be."

"Have you?" he says, looking up. "I dare say. Well, I will tell you. Do you re-

member—I dare say you do not—my once mentioning to you that I had some property in the West Indies—in Antigua?"

I nod.

"To be sure I do: I recollect I had not an idea where Antigua was, and I looked out for it at once in Tou Tou's atlas."

"Well, a fortnight—three weeks ago—it was when we were in Dresden, I had a letter telling me of the death of my agent out there. I knew nothing about him personally—had never seen him—but he had long been in my poor brother's employment, and was very highly thought of by him."

"*Poor* brother!" think I; "well, thank Heaven! at least *he* has not revived; he would not be 'poor' if he had," but I say only, "Yes?" with a delicately interrogative accent.

"And to-day comes this letter"—(pulling one out of his pocket)—"telling me that, now that his affairs have been looked into, they are found to be in the greatest confusion—that he has died bankrupt, in fact; and not only *that*, but that he has been cheating me right and left for years and years, appropriating the money which ought to have been spent on the estate to his own uses; and, as misfortunes never come single, I also hear"—(unfolding the sheet, and glancing rather disconsolately over it)—"that there has been a hurricane, which has destroyed nearly all the sugar-canes."

The thought of *Job* and his successive misfortunes instantly occurs to me—the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, the great wind from the wilderness—but, being a little doubtful as to his example having a very consoling effect, with some difficulty, and at the cost of a great pressure exercised on myself, I abstain from mentioning him.

"To make a long story short," continues Sir Roger, "and not to bother you with unnecessary details—"

"But indeed they would not bother me," interrupt I, eagerly, putting my hand through his arm, and turning my face anxiously up to him; "I should *enjoy* hearing them. I wish you would not think that all sensible, sober things *bother* me."

"My dear," he says, gently pinching my cheek, "I think nothing of the kind, but I know that not all the explanations in the world will alter the result, which is, that I shall not get a farthing from the property *this* year, and very likely not *next* either."

"You do not say so!" cry I, trying to impart a tragic tone to my voice, and only hoping that my face *looks* more distressed and aghast than it feels.

To tell you the truth, I am mightily relieved. At this period of my history, money troubles seem to me the lightest and airiest of all afflictions. I have sat down, and Sir Roger is walking up and down, with a restlessness unlike his usual repose; on his face there is a vexed and thwarted look, that is unfamiliar to me. The old parrot sits in the sun, outside his cage, scratching his head, and chuckling to himself. Tou Tou's voice comes ringing from the garden. It has a tone of mingled laughter and pain, which tells me that she is undergoing severe and searching discipline at the hands of Bobby.

"I suppose," say I, presently, speaking with some diffidence, "that *that* is *all*. Of course I do not mean to say that it is not very bad, but is there nothing *worse?*"

"Is not it *bad enough?*" he asks, half laughing. "What did you expect?"

"You know," say I, hesitatingly, "I have not an idea *how* well off you are; I mean, how much a year you have. Mercenary as I am"—(laughing nervously)—"I never thought of asking you; but I suppose, even if the earth were to open and swallow Antigua—even if there were no such things as West Indies—we should still have money enough to buy us bread and cheese, should not we?"

"Well, it is to be hoped so," he answers, a gleam of amusement flashing like a little sunshiny arrow across his vexation; "it would be a bad lookout for you and me, would not it, considering the size of our appetites, if we should not?"

A little pause. Tou Tou's voice again. The anguish has conquered the laughter, and is now mixed with a shrill treble wrath. Polly is alternately barking like Vick and laughing with a quiet amusement at his own performance.

"Do you think," say I, still airing my opinions with timidity, as one that has no great opinion of their worth, "that it does one much good to be rich beyond a certain point?—that a large establishment, for instance,

gives one much pleasure? I am sure it does not in *our* case; if you were to know the number of nails that the servants and their iniquities have knocked into mother's coffin—yes, and father's too."

"Have they?" (a little absently). He is still pacing up and down restlessly—to and fro—along and across—he that is usually so innocent of fidget or fuss. "Nancy," he says, half seriously, half in rueful jest, "if you want a thing done, do it yourself: mind that, all your life. I am a standing instance of the disadvantage of having let other people do it for me. The fact is, I ought to have gone out there long ago, to look after things myself."

"If you *had* been there, you could not have stopped the hurricane coming, any more than Canute could stop the waves," say I, filching a piece of history from "Little Arthur," and pushing it to the front.

He smiles.

"Not the hurricane—no; but the hurricane was the lesser evil. I might have done something to avert, or, at least, lessen the greater one. To tell the truth, I meant to have gone out there this spring—had, indeed, almost fixed upon a day for starting, when—*you* stopped me.

"*I!*"

"Yes," he says, pausing in his walk in front of me, and looking at me with a face full of sunshine, content, and laughter; a face whence hurricanes, West Indies, and agents, have altogether fled; "you called me a '*beast*,' and the expression startled me so much—I suppose from not being used to it—that it sent the West Indies, yes, and the East ones too, clean out of my head."

"I hope," say I, anxiously, "that you will never tell any one that I said *that*. They would think that I was in the habit of calling people '*beasts*,' and indeed—*indeed*, I very seldom use so strong a word, *even* to Bobby."

"Well," he says, not heeding my request, not, I am sure, hearing it, and resuming his walk, "what is done cannot be undone, so there is no use whining about it, Nancy" (again stopping before me, and this time taking my face in his two hands). "Will you mind much, or will you not?—do you ever mind *any thing much*, I wonder?" (eagerly and wistfully scanning my face, as if trying to read my character through the mask of my pale skin, and small and unremarkable features). "Well, there is no help for it—as I did not go then, I must go now."

"Go!" repeat I, panting in horrid surprise, "go where?—to Antigua?"

"Yes, to Antigua."

No need now to dress my voice in the tones of factitious tragedy—no need to lengthen my face artificially. It feels all of a sudden quite a yard and a half long. Polly has stopped barking: he is now calling, "Barb'ra! Barb'ra!" in father's voice, and he hits off the pompous severity of his tone with such awful accuracy, that, did not my eyes assure me to the contrary, I could swear that my parent was in the room.

After a moment I rise, throw my arms round Sir Roger, and lay my head on his breast—a most unwonted caress on my part, for we are not a couple by any means given to endearments.

"Do not go!" I say in a coaxing whisper, "do nothing of the kind!—stay at home!"

"And will *you* go instead of me?" he asks with a gentle irony, stroking, the while, my plaits as delicately as if he were afraid that they would *come off*, which indeed, *indeed*, they would not.

"By myself?" said I, laughing, but not raising my head. "Oh! of course; nothing I should like better, and I should be so invaluable in mending the sugar-canes, and keeping the new agent on his P's and Q's, should not I?"

He laughs.

"Stay!" say I, again whispering, as being more persuasive; "where would be the use of going *now?* It would be shutting the stable-door after the steed was stolen, and—" (this in a still lower voice)—"we are beginning to get on so nicely, too."

"Beginning!" he echoes, with a half-melancholy smile, "only *beginning?* have not we always got on nicely?"

"And if we are poorer," continue I, insinuatingly, "I believe that we shall get on better still. I am sure that poor people are fonder of one another than rich ones—they have less to distract them from each other."

I have now raised my head, and perceive that Sir Roger does not look very much convinced.

"But granting that poverty *is* better than

riches, do you believe that it *is*, Nancy?—for my part, I doubt it—for myself I will own to you that I have found it pleasant not to be obliged to look at sixpence upon both sides; but *that*," he says, with straightforward simplicity, "is perhaps because I have not long been used to it—because once, long ago, I wanted money badly—I would have given my right hand for it, and could not get it!"

"What did you want it for?" cry I, curiously, pricking my ears, and for a moment forgetting my private troubles in the hope of a forthcoming anecdote.

"Ah! would not you like to know?" he says, playfully, but he does not explain; instead, he goes on: "Even granting that it is so, do you think it would be very manly to let a fine estate run to ruin, because one was too lazy to look after it? Do you think it would be quite *honest*—quite fair to those that will come after us?"

"*Those that will come after us!*" cry I, scornfully, making a face for the third and last time this morning. "And who are they, pray? Some sixteenth cousin of yours, I suppose?"

"Nancy," he says, gravely, but in a tone whose gentleness takes all harshness from the words, "you are talking nonsense, and you know as well as I do that you are!"

Then I know that I may as well be silent. After a pause:

"And when," say I, in as lamentable a voice as King Darius sent down among the lions in search of Daniel—"how soon, I mean, are we to set off?"

"*We!*" he cries, a sudden light springing into his eyes, and an accent of keen pleasure into his voice. "Do you mean to say that *you* thought of coming too?"

I look up in surprise.

"Do not wives generally go with their husbands?"

"But would you *like* to come?" he asks, seizing my hands, and pressing them with such unconscious eagerness, that my wedding-ring makes a red print in its neighbor-finger.

O friends, I wish to Heaven that I had told a lie! It would have been, I am sure, one of the cases in which a lie would have been justifiable—nay, praiseworthy, too. But, standing there, under the truth of his eyes, I have to be true, too.

"Like!" say I, evasively, casting down my eyes, and fiddling uneasily with one of the buttons of his coat, "it is hardly a question of '*like*,' is it? I do not imagine that you *like* it much yourself?—one cannot always be thinking of what one likes."

The pressure of his fingers on mine slackens; and, though, thanks to my wedding-ring, it was painful, I am sorry. After a minute:

"But you have not," say I, trying to speak in a tone of light and airy cheerfulness, "answered my question yet—how soon we must set off? You know what a woman always thinks of first—her *clothes*, and I must be seeing to my packing."

"The sooner the better," he answers, with a preoccupied look. "Not later than ten days hence!"

"*Ten days!*"

Again my jaw falls. He has altogether loosed my hands now, and resumed his walk. I sit down by the table, lean my elbows on it, and push my fingers through my hair in most dejected musing. Polly has been dressing himself; turning his head over his shoulder, and arranging his feathers with his aquiline nose. He has finished now, and has just given vent, in a matter-of-fact, unemotional voice, to an awful oath! There is the sound of brisk feet on the sunny gravel outside. Bobby's face looks in at the window—broad, sunburnt, and laughing.

"Well! what is up now?" cries he, catching a glimpse of my disconsolate attitude. "You look as if the fungi had disagreed with you!"

"Then appearances are deceitful," reply I, trying to be merry, "for they have not."

He has only glanced in upon us in passing: he is gone again now. I rebury my hands in my locks, which, instead of a highly-cultivated garden, I am rapidly making into a wilderness.

"I suppose," say I, in a tone which fitly matches the length of my face, "that Bobby will have got a ship before I come back; I hope they will not send him to any very unhealthy station—Hong-Kong, or the Gold Coast."

"I hope not."

"What port shall we sail from?"

"Southampton."

"And how long—about how long will the voyage be?"

"About seventeen days to Antigua."

"And how long"—(still in the same wretched and resignedly melancholy voice)—"shall we have to stay there?"

"It depends upon the state in which I find things."

A good long pause. My elbows are growing quite painful, from the length of time during which they have been digging into the hard *marqueterie* table, and my hair is as wild as a red Indian's. *Ten* days! ten little galloping days, and then *seventeen* long, slow, monstrous ones! *Seventeen* days at sea! seventeen days and seventeen nights, too—do not let us forget that—of that deadly nausea, of that unspeakable sinking of all one's inside to the very depths of creation—of the smell of boiling oil, and the hot, sick throbbing of engines!

"I hope," say I, in a voice so small that I hardly recognize it for my own, "that I shall not be *quite* as ill all the way as I was crossing from Calais to Dover; and the steward," continue I, in miserable meditation, "kept telling me all the while what a fine passage we were having, too!"

"So we were!"

Another pause. I am still thinking of the horrid theme; living over again my nearly-forgotten agonies.

"Do you remember," say I, presently, "hearing about that Lady Somebody—I forget her name—but she was the wife of one Governor-General of India, and she always suffered so much from sea-sickness that she thought she should suffer less in a sailing-vessel, and so returned from India in one, and just as she came in sight of the shores of England, *she died!*"

As I reach this awful climax, I open my eyes very wide, and sink my voice to a tragic depth.

"The moral is—" says Sir Roger, stopping beside me, laying his hand on my chair back, and regarding me with a mixture of pain and diversion in his eyes, "stick to steam!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A HEAVY foot along the passage, a hand upon the door, a hatted head looking in.

"Roger," says father, in that laboriously-amiable voice in which he always addresses his son-in-law, "sorry to interrupt you, but could you come here for a minute—will not keep you long."

"All right!" cries Sir Roger, promptly.

"How *can* he speak in that flippantly-cheerful voice, with a prospect of seventeen days' sea before him?"

"Now, where did I put my hat, Nancy? did you happen to notice?"

"It is here," say I, picking it up from the window-seat, and handing it to him with lugubrious solemnity.

As he reaches the door, following father, he turns and nods to me with a half-humorous smile.

"Cheer up," he says, "it shall not be a sailing-vessel."

He is gone, and I return to my former position, and my former occupation, only that now—the check of Sir Roger's presence being removed—I indulge in two or three hearty groans. To think how the look of all things is changed this morning!

As we came home through the fields singing, if any one had given me three wishes, I should have been puzzled what to ask—and *now!* All the good things I am going to lose march in gloomy procession before my mind. *No house-warming?* It will have to be put off till we come back, and, by the time that we come back, Bobby will almost certainly have been sent to some foreign station for three or four years. And who knows what may happen before he returns? Perhaps—for I am in the mood when all adversities seem antecedently probable—he will *never* come back. Perhaps never again shall I be the willing victim of his buffets, never again shall I buffet him in return.

And the *sea!* It is all very fine for Sir Roger to take it so easily, to laugh and make unfeeling jokes at my expense! *He* does not lie on the flat of his back, surrounded by the horrid paraphernalia of sea-sickness. *He* walks up and down, with his hands in his pockets, smoking a cigar, and talking to the captain. *He* cares nothing for the heaving planks. The taste of the salt air gives *him* an appetite. An *appetite!* Oh, prodigious! I must say I think he might have been a *little* more feeling, might have expressed himself a *little* more sympathetically.

By dint of thinking over Sir Roger's iniquities on this head, I gradually work mysalf up into such a state of righteous indignation and injury against him, that, when, after a longish interval, the door again opens to readmit him, I affect neither to see nor hear him, nor be in any way conscious of his presence. Through the chinks of my fingers, dolorously spread over my face, I see that he has sat down on the other side of the table, just opposite me, and that he is smiling in the same unmirthful, gently-sarcastic way as he was when he left me.

"Nancy," he says, "I have been thinking what a pity it is that I have not a *yacht!* We might have taken our own time then, and done it enjoyably—made quite a pleasure-trip of it."

I drop my hands into my lap.

"People's ideas of pleasure differ," I say, with trite snappishness.

"Yes," he answers, a little sadly, "no two people look at any thing in *quite* the same way, do they?—not even husband and wife."

"I suppose not," say I, still thinking of the steward.

"Do you know," he says, leaning his arms and his crossed hands on the table between us, and steadfastly regarding me, "that I never saw you look miserable before, never? I did not even know that you *could!*"

"I am not *miserable*," I answer, rather ashamed of myself, "that is far too strong a word! Of course, I am a little disappointed." Then I mumble off into an indistinctness, whence the nouns "House-warming," "Bobby," "Gold Coast," crop out, audibly.

"After all," he says, still regarding me, and speaking kindly, yet a little coldly, too, "you need not look so woe-begone. They say second thoughts are best, do not they? Well, I have been thinking second thoughts, and—I have altered my mind."

"You are going to stay at home?" cry I, at the top of my voice, jumping up in an ecstasy, and beginning to clap my hands.

"No," he says, gently, "not *quite* that; as I explained to you before, that is impossible: but—do not be downcast—something nearly as good. I am going to leave *you* at home!"

To leave me at home! My first feeling is one of irrepressible relief. No sea! no steward! no courtesying ship! no swaying waves, after all! Then comes a quick and strong revulsion—shame, mortification, and pain.

"To—leave—me—at home!" I repeat, slowly, hardly yet grasping the idea, "to—go *without*—me!—by yourself?"

"By myself," he answers, gently. "You see, it is no *new* thing to me. I have been by myself for forty-seven years."

A quick, remorseful pain runs through my heart.

"But you are not by yourself any longer," I cry, eagerly. "Why do you talk as if you were? Do you count *me* for nothing?"

"For nothing?" he answers, smiling quietly. "I am glad of an excuse to be rid of you for a bit—that is it!"

"But *is* that it?" cry I, excitedly, rising and running round to him. "If you are sure of that—if you will *swear* it to me—I will not say another word. I will hold my tongue, and try to bear, as well as I can, your having grown tired of me so soon—but—" speaking more slowly, and hesitating, "if—if—it is that you fancied—you thought—you imagined—that I did not *want* to come with you—"

"My dear," he says, laughing not at all bitterly, but with a genuine amusement, "I should have been even less bright than I am if I had not gathered that much."

I sink down on a chair, and cover my face with my hands. My *attitude* is the same as it was ten minutes ago, but oh, how different are my feelings! What bitter repentance, what acute self-contempt, invade my soul! As I so sit, I feel an arm round my waist.

"Nancy," says Sir Roger, "it was ill-naturedly said; do not fret about it; you were not in the least to blame. I should not like you half so much—should not think nearly so well of you, if you had been willing to give up all your own people, to throw them lightly over, all of a sudden, for a comparative stranger, treble your age, too"—(with a sigh)—"like me."

He generously ignores the selfish fear of sea-sickness, of *personal* suffering, which had occupied the fore-front of my mind.

"It will be much, *much* better, and a far more sensible plan for both of us," he continues, cheerfully. "Where would be the use of exposing you to the discomfort and misery of what you hate most on earth for no possible profit? I shall not be long away, shall be

back almost before you realize that I am gone, and meanwhile I should be far happier thinking of you merry, and enjoying yourself with your brothers and sisters at Tempest, than I should be seeing you bored and suffering, with no one but me to amuse you—you know, dear—" (smiling pensively), "do not be angry with me, it was no fault of yours; but you *did* grow rather tired of me at Dresden."

"I did not! I did not!" cry I, bursting into a passion of tears, and asseverating all the more violently because I feel, with a sting of remorse, that there is a tiny grain of truth —not so large a one as he thinks, but still a *grain*—in his accusations. "It seemed rather *quiet* at first—I had always been used to such a noisy house, and I missed the boys' chatter a little, perhaps; but *indeed*, INDEED, that was all!"

"Was it? I dare say! I dare say!" he says, soothingly.

"You shall *not* leave me behind," say I, still weeping with stormy bitterness. "I *will not* be left behind! What business have you to go without me? Am I to be only a fair-weather wife to you? to go shares in all your pleasant things, and then—when any thing hard or disagreeable comes—to be left out? I tell you" (looking up at him with streaming eyes) "that I *will not!* I WILL NOT!"

"My darling!" he says, looking most thoroughly concerned—I do not fancy that crying women have formed a large part of his life-experience—"you misunderstand me! I will own to you, that five minutes ago I did you an injustice; but *now* I know, I am thoroughly convinced, that you would follow me without a murmur or a sulky look to the world's end—and" (laughing) "be frightfully sea-sick all the way; but" (kindly patting my heaving shoulder) "do you think that I want to be hampered with a little invalid? and, supposing that I took you with me, whom should I have to look after things at Tempest, and keep them straight for me against I come home?"

"I know what it is," I cry, passionately clinging round his neck, "you think I do not like you! I *see* it! twenty times a day, in a hundred things that you do and leave undone! but indeed, *indeed*, you never were more mistaken in all your life! I will own to you that I did not care *very* much about you at first. I thought you good, and kind, and excellent, but I was not *fond* of you; but *now*, every hour that I live, I like you better! Ask Barbara, ask the boys if I do not! I like you ten thousand times better than I did the day I married you!"

"*Like* me!" he repeats a little dreamily, looking with a strong and bitter yearning into my eyes; then, seeing that I am going to asseverate, "do not tell me that you *love* me, for I know it is not true! you can no more help it than I can help caring for you in the idiotic, mad way, that I do! Perhaps, on some blessed, far-off day, you may be able to say so, and I to believe it, but not now!—*not now!*"

CHAPTER XX.

WITH feet as heavy and slowly-dragging as those of some unwieldy person, with drooped figure, and stained and swollen face, I enter the school-room an hour latter to tell my ill-news.

"Enter a young mourner!" says Algy, facetiously, in unkind allusion to the gloom of my appearance, which is perhaps heightened by the black-silk gown I wear.

"What *is* up?" cries Bobby, advancing toward me with an overpowering curiosity, not unmixed with admiration, legible on his burned face; "what *has* summoned those glorious sunset tints into your eyes and nose?"

"Which of Turner's pictures," says Algy, putting up his hand in the shape of a spy-glass to one eye, and critically regarding me through it, "is she so like in coloring? the 'Founding of Carthage,' or 'The Fighting Temeraire?'"

"Shame! shame!" cries Bobby, in a mock hortatory tone, trying to swell himself out to the shape and bulk of our fat rector, and to speak in his wheezy tone, "that a young woman so richly dowered with the good things of this life; a young woman with a husband and a deer-park in possession, and a housewarming in prospect—"

"But I have not," interrupt I, speaking for the first time, and with a snuffliness of tone engendered by much crying.

"Have not? have not *what?*"

"Have not a house-warming in prospect," reply I, with distinct malignity. A moment's silence. My bomb-shell has worked quite as much havoc as I expected.

"But where has it gone to since this morning?" asks Algy, looking rather blank.

"What do you mean?" cries Tou Tou, shrilly; "it was only last night that you were asking me for the Brat's address that you might invite him."

"And tell him to bring a judiciously selected assortment of undergraduate friends with him," supplements Bobby, loudly.

"Yes," say I, sighing, "I know I did; but last night was last night."

"That throws a great deal of light on the matter, does it not?" says Algy, ironically.

"Nancy!" cries Bobby, seizing both my hands, and looking me in the face with an air of irritated determination, "if you do not *this moment* stop sighing like a windmill, and tell us what is up, I will go to Sir Roger, hanged if I will not, and ask him what he means by making you cry yourself to a *jelly!*"

At this bold metaphor applied to my own appearance, the tears begin again to start to my eyes.

"Do not!" cry I, eagerly, catching at his wrists in detention, "it was not his fault! he could not help it; but" (mopping first one eye and then the other, and finishing by a dolorous blast on my nose) "but I am so disappointed, every thing is *so* changed, and I know I shall miss him *so* much!" I end with a break in my voice, and a long whimper.

"*Miss him!* miss whom?"

"The ge-general!" reply I, indistinctly, from the recesses of a drenched pocket-handkerchief.

"But what is going to happen to him? where is he going to? I wish that you would be a little more intelligible," cry they all, impatiently.

"He is going to the West Indies, to Antigua," reply I, lifting my face and speaking with a slow dejection.

"*To Antigua!*" cries Algy; "but what in the world is going to take him there?"

"Perhaps," says Bobby, in a loud aside to Tou Tou, "perhaps he has got another wife out there—a *black* one—and he thinks it is *her* turn now!"

Barbara says, "Hush!" and Tou Tou is beginning to embark on a long argument to prove that a man *cannot* have more than one wife at a time, when she is summarily *hustled* into silence, for I speak again.

"He has some property in the West Indies—I knew he had before—" (with a passing flash of pride in my superior information)—"I dare say you did not—and he has to go out there to look after it."

"*By himself?*"

"By himself, worse luck!" reply I, despondently, reinterring my countenance in my pocket-handkerchief.

"And you decline to accompany him? Well, I think you are about right!" says Algy, rising, lounging over to the empty hearth, and looking at his face with a glance of serious fondness in the glass that hangs above the mantel-shelf.

"I do nothing of the kind!" cry I, indignantly, "I have not the chance! he will not take me!"

I am not looking at him, nor, indeed, in his direction at all; but I am aware that Bobby is giving Tou Tou a private and severe nudge, which means "Attend! here is confirmation of my theory for you!" and that the idea of the hypothetical black lady is again traversing his ingenuous mind.

"I hope he will bring us some Jamaica ginger," he says, presently.

"I wish you would mention it, Nancy! the suggestion would come best from *you*, would not it?"

"And you are to be left *alone* at Tempest? Is that the plan?" asks Algy, turning his eyes from his own face, and fixing them on the less interesting object of mine.

It may be my imagination, but I cannot help fancying that there is a tone of slight and repressed exultation in his voice; and also that a look of hope and bright expectation is passing from one to another of the faces round me. All but Barbara's! Barbara always understands.

"*All alone?*" cries Tou Tou, opening her ugly little eyes to their widest stretch. "Nobody but the servants in the house with you? Will not you be very much afraid of *ghosts?*"

"She need never be alone, unless she chooses," says Bobby, winking with dexterous slightness at the others; "there is the beauty of having three kind little brothers!"

"The moment you feel *at all* lonely," says Algy, emphasizing his remarks by benevolent but emphatic strokes with his flat hand on my shoulder, "*send for us!* one of us is sure to be handy! If it will be any comfort to Sir Roger, I shall be most happy to promise him that I will keep *all* his horses in exercise next winter!"

"I am sorrier than I was before," says Bobby, reflectively, "that the heavy rains have drowned so many of the young birds."

"O Nancy!" cries Tou Tou, ecstatically clasping her hands, "*have* a Christmas-tree!"

"And a dance after it!" adds Bobby, beginning to whistle a waltz-tune.

"And Sir Roger's not being at home will be a good excuse for not asking father," cries Algy, catching the prevailing excitement.

"I will not have *one* of you!" cry I, rising with a face pale, as I feel with anger—with flashing eyes and a trembling voice, "not *one* of you shall enter his doors, except Barbara!—I *hate* you *all!*—you are all g—g—*glad* that he is going, and I—I never was so sorry for any thing in my life before!"

I end in a passion of tears. There is a silence of consternation on the late so jubilant assembly.

"'Times is changed,' says the dog's-meat man,"

remarks Bobby, presently, veiling his discomfiture in vulgarity, and launching into uncouth and low-lived rhyme:

"'Lights is riz,' says the dog's-meat man!"

CHAPTER XXI.

However, not all the hot tears in the world—not all the swelled noses and boiled-gooseberry eyes avail to alter the case. Not even all my righteous wrath against the boys profits—and I do keep Bobby at arms'-length for a day and a half. No one who does not know Bobby understands how difficult such a course of proceeding is; for he is one of those people who ignore the finer shades of displeasure. The more delicately dignified and civilly frosty one is to him, the more grossly familiar and hopelessly, obtusely friendly is he. I have made several more efforts to change Sir Roger's decision, but in vain. He makes the case more difficult by laying his refusal chiefly on his own convenience; dilating on the much greater speed and ease with which he will be able to transact his business, if *alone*, than if weighted by a woman, and a woman's paraphernalia, and also on the desirability of having in me a *locum tenens* for himself at Tempest. But, in my soul, I know that both these are hollow pretenses to lighten the weight on my conscience.

"But," say I, with discontented demurring, "you have been away often before! how did Tempest get on *then?*"

He laughs.

"Very middling, indeed! last time I was away the servants gave a ball in the new ball-room—so my friends told me afterward, and the time before, the butler took the house-keeper a driving-tour in my T.-cart. I should not have minded *that* much—but I suppose he was not a very good whip, and so he threw down one of my best horses, and broke his knees!"

"Well, they *shall not* give a ball!" say I, resolutely, but"—(in a tone of melancholy helplessness)—"they may throw down *all* the horses, for any thing *I* can do to prevent them! A horse's knees would have to be *very much broken* before I should perceive that they were!"

"You must get Algy to help you," he says, kindly. "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, is not it? Poor boy!"—(laughing)—"you must not expect *him* to be very keen about my speedy return."

As he speaks, an arrow of animosity toward Algy shoots through my heart.

We are at Tempest—Sir Roger and I. It has been his wish to establish me there before his departure; and now it is the gray of the evening before his setting off, and we are strolling through the still park. Vick is racing, with idiotic ardor, through the tall green bracken, after the mottled deer, yelping with shrill insanity, and vainly imagining that she is going to overtake them. The gray rabbits are scuttling across the grass rides in the pale light: as I see them popping in and out of their holes, I cannot help thinking of Bobby. Apparently, Sir Roger also is reminded of him.

"Nancy," he says, looking down at me with a smile of recollected entertainment, "have you forgiven Bobby yet for leaving

you sitting on the wall? I remember, in the first blaze of your indignation, you vowed that never should he fire a gun in your preserves! —do you still stick to it, or have you forgiven him?"

"*That* I have not!" cry I, heartily. "None of them shall shoot any thing! Why should they? Every thing shall be kept for you against you come back!"

He raises his eyebrows a little.

"Rabbits and all?"

"Rabbits and all!" reply I, firmly.

"And what will the farmers say?" asks Sir Roger, smiling.

I have not considered this aspect of the question, so remain silent. We walk on without speaking for some moments. The deer, in lofty pity for Vick, have stopped to allow her to get nearer to them. With their fine noses in the air, and their proud necks compassionately turned toward her, they are waiting, while she pushes, panting and shrieking, through the stout fern-stems; then, leap cruelly away in airy bounds.

"If I am not back by Christmas—" says Sir Roger, presently.

"By *Christmas!*" interrupt I, aghast, "one, two, three, four, *five* months—but you *must!*—you MUST!" clasping both hands on his arm.

"I hope I shall, certainly," replies he; "but one never knows what may happen! If I am *not*—"

"But you *must*," repeat I, urgently, and apparently resolved that he shall never reach the end of his sentence; "if you are not—I warn you—you may not like it—I dare say you will not—but—I shall come to look for you!"

"In a *sailing-vessel*, like the governor-general's wife?" asks he with a smile.

. . . . .

And now he is gone! gone in the first freshness of the morning! This year, I seem fated to witness the childhood of many summer days. The carriage that bears him away is lost to sight—dwindled away to nothing among the park-trees. Five minutes ago, my arms were clinging, with a tightness of clasp that a bear might have admired, round his neck. I was too choked with tears to say much, and kept repeating with the persistence of a guinea-fowl, but without the distinctness, "Come back! come back!"

And now he is gone; and I am left standing at the hall-door with level hand shading my eyes from the red sun—with a smeared face—with the butler and two footmen respectfully regarding my affliction—(*they* do not like to disappear, till they have shut the door—*I* do not like to ask them to retire, and I do not like to lose the last glimpse) so there I remain—nineteen—a grass widow, and—ALONE! I shall not, however, be alone for long; for this evening Barbara is coming. Algy is to bring her, and to stay a few days on his way to Aldershott. All day long, I wander with restless aimlessness about the house, my big house—so empty, so orderly in its stateliness—so frightfully silent! Ah! the doll's house whose whole front came out at once was a better companion—much more friendly, and not half so oppressive. In almost every room, I cry profusely—disagreeable tears of shame and remorse and grief—only, O friends! I will tell you *now*, what I would not tell myself then, that the grief, though true, was not so great as either of the other feelings. I lunch in the great dining-room, with tall full-length Tempests eying me with constant placidity from the walls; with the butler and footman still trying respectfully to ignore my swelled nose and bunged-up eyes.

As evening draws on—evening that is to bring some voices, some sound of steps to me and my great dumb house—I revive a little. If it were Bobby that were coming, my mind would be weighted by the thought of the repression his spirits would need, but Algy's mirth is several shades less violent, and Barbara is never jarringly joyful. So I change my dress, bathe my face, make my maid retwist my hair, and prepare to be chastenedly and moderately glad to see them.

At least there will be some one to occupy two more of these numberless chairs; two more for the stolid family portraits to eye; two voices, nay *three*, for *I* shall speak then, to drown the sounding silence.

It is time that they should be here. The carriage went to the station more than an hour ago. I sit down in a window-seat that commands the park, and look along the drive by which the general went this morning.

Dear Roger! I will practise calling him "Roger" when I am by myself, and then

perhaps I may be able to address him by it when he comes home. I will say, "How are you, Roger?"

I have fallen into a pleasant reverie, with my head leaned against the curtain, in which I see myself giving glib utterance to this formula, as I stand in a blue gown—Roger likes me in blue—and a blue cap—I look older in a cap—while he precipitates himself madly—

My reverie breaks off. Some one has entered, and is standing by me. It is a footman, with a telegram on a salver. Albeit I know the trivial causes for which people employ the telegraph-wires nowadays, I never can get over my primal deadly fear of those yellow envelopes, that seem emblems and messengers of battle, murder, and sudden death. As I tear it open, a hundred horrible impossible possibilities flash across my brain. Algy and Barbara have both been killed in a railway-accident, and have telegraphed to tell me so; the same fate has happened to Roger, and he has adopted the same course.

"*Algernon Grey to Lady Tempest.*

"Cannot come: not allowed. *He* has turned nasty."

The paper drops into my lap, as I draw a long breath of mingled relief and disappointment. A whole long evening—long night of this solitude before me! perhaps much more, for they do not even say that they will come to-morrow! I *must* utter my disappointment to somebody, even if it is only the footman.

"They are not coming!" say I, plaintively; then, recollecting and explaining myself, "I mean, they need not send in dinner! I will not have any!" I *cannot* stand another repast—three times longer than the last too—for one *can* abridge luncheon, seated in lorn dignity between the staring dead on the walls, and the obsequious living.

As soon as the man is fairly out of the room, I cry again. Yes, though my hair is readjusted, though I spent more than a quarter of an hour in bathing my eyes, and restoring some semblance of white to their lids, though I had resolved—and without much difficulty, too, hitherto—to be dry-eyed for the rest of the evening. What does it matter what color my eyelids are? what size my nose is? or how beblubbered my cheeks? Not a soul will see them except my maid, and I am naturally indifferent as to the effect I produce upon her. I look at the clock on the mantelpiece. It has stopped—ornamental clocks mostly do—but even this trivial circumstance adds to my affliction. I instantly take out my pocket-handkerchief, and begin to cry again. Then I look at my watch—a quarter-past seven only—and my watch always gains! Two hours and three-quarters before I can, with the smallest semblance of decency, go to bed. Meanwhile I am hungry. Though my husband has deserted me, though my brother and sister have failed me, my appetite has done neither.

Faithful friend! never yet was it known to quit me, and here it is! I decide to have *tea* in my own boudoir. Tea is informal, and one need not be waited on at it. When it comes, I try to dawdle over it as much as possible, to sip my tea with labored slowness, and bite each mouthful with conscientious care. When I have finished, I think with satisfaction that I cannot have occupied less than half an hour. Again I consult my watch. Exactly twelve minutes. It is now five minutes to eight; two hours and five minutes more! I sigh loudly, and, putting on my hat, stroll out into the wide and silent garden. It is as yet unfamiliar to me.

I do not know where half the walks lead. I have no favorite haunts, no chosen spot of solitude and greenery, where old and pleasant thoughts meet me. Many such have I at home, but none here. I wander objectlessly, pleasurelessly about with Vick—apparently sharing my depression—trotting subduedly, with tail half-mast high, at my heels, and at length sit down on a bench under a mulberry-tree. The scentless flame of the geraniums and calceolarias fills, without satisfying my eyes; the gnats' officious hum offends my ears; and thoughts, in comparison of which the calceolarias are sweet and the gnats melodious, occupy my mind.

Sir Roger will most likely be drowned on his voyage out. Bobby will almost certainly be sent to Hong-Kong, and, as a natural consequence, die of a putrid fever. Algy has just entered the army; there can be no two opinions as to our going to war immediately with either Russia or America. Algy will probably be among the first to fall, and will die, grasping his colors, and shouting "Vic-

tory!" or "Westminster Abbey!" or perhaps both.

I have not yet decided what he shall be shouting, when the current of my thoughts is turned by seeing some one—thank Heaven, not a footman, this time!—advancing across the sward toward me. Surely I know the nonchalant lounge of that walk—the lazy self-consciousness of that gait, though, when last I saw it, it was not on dewy English turf, but on the baking flags of a foreign town. It is Mr. Musgrave. Until this moment I have ungratefully forgotten his existence, and all the interesting facts he told me connected with his existence—how his lodge faces ours—how he has no father nor mother, and lives by himself at an abbey. Alas! in this latter particular, can I not feel for him? Am *I* not living by myself at a *hall?*

Vick recognizes him at about the same moment as I do. Having first sprung at him with that volubility of small but hostile *yaps*, with which she strikes terror into the hearts of tramps, she has now—having *smelt* him to be not only respectable, but an acquaintance—changed her behavior to a little servile whine and a series of high jumps at his hand.

"It is you, is it?" cry I, springing up and running to meet him with an elate sensation of company and sociability; "I had quite forgotten that you lived near here. I'm *so* glad!"

At my happy remark as to having been hitherto oblivious of his existence, his face falls in the old lowering way I remember so well, and that brings back to me so forcibly the Prager Strasse, the Zwinger, the even sunshine, that favored my honey-moon; but at the heartily-expressed joy at seeing him, with which I conclude, he cheers up again. If he had known that I was in so reduced a state that I should have enjoyed a colloquy with a chimney-sweep, and not despised exchanging opinions with a dustman, he would not have thought my admission worth much.

"So you have come at last!" he says, holding my hand, and looking at me with those long dark eyes that I would swear were black had not a conscientious and thorough daylight scrutiny of them assured me long ago that they were hazel.

"Yes," say I, cheerfully; "I told you you would catch sight of us, sooner or later, if you waited long enough."

"And your tenants never dragged you in, after all?"

"No," say I; "we did not give them the chance. But how do *you* know? Were you peeping out of your lodge? If I had remembered that you lived there, I would have been on the lookout for you."

"You had, of course, entirely forgotten so insignificant a fact?" he says, with a tone of pique.

That happy one! how well I recollect it! I feel quite fondly toward it; it reminds me so strongly of the Linkesches Bad, of the brisk band, and of Roger smoking and smiling at me with his gray eyes across our Maitrank.

"Yes," I say, contritely, "I am ashamed to say I had—*quite;* but you see I have had a good many things to think of lately."

At this point it strikes me that he must have forgotten that he has my hand, so I quietly, and without offense, resume it.

"And you are *alone*—Sir Roger has left you quite *alone* here?".

"Yes," say I, lachrymosely; "is not it *dreadful?* I never was so miserable in my life; I do not think I *ever* was by myself for a *whole* night before, and"—(lowering my voice to a nervous whisper)—"they tell me there is a ghost somewhere about. Did you ever hear of it?—and the furniture gives *such* cracks?

"And—he has gone *by himself?*" he continues, still harping on the same string, as if unable to leave it.

"Yes," reply I, laconically, hanging my head, for this is a topic on which I feel always guilty, and never diffuse.

"H'm!" he says, ruminatingly, and as if addressing the remark more to himself than to me. "I suppose it *is* difficult to get out of old habits, and into new ones, all of a sudden."

"I do not know what you mean by old habits and new habits," cry I, angrily; "if you think he did not want me to go with him, you are very much mistaken; he would have much rather that I had."

"But *you*," looking at me penetratingly, and speaking with a sort of alacrity, "you did not see it? I remember of old" (with a smile) "your abhorrence of the sea."

"You are wrong again," say I, reddening, and still speaking with some heat, "I *wished* to go—I begged him to take me. However sick I had been, I should have liked it better than being left moping here, without a soul to speak to!"

Silence for a moment. Then he speaks with a rather sarcastic smile.

"I confess myself puzzled; if *you* were dying to go, and *he* were dying to take you, how comes it that you are sitting at the present moment on this bench?"

I can give no satisfactory answer to this query, so take refuge in a smile.

"I see," say I, tartly, "that you have still your old trick of asking questions. I wish that you would try to get the better of it; it is very disadvantageous to you, and very trying to other people!"

He takes this severe set-down in silence.

The trees that surround the garden are slowly darkening. The shadows that intervene between the round masses of the sycamore-leaves deepen, deepen. A bat flitters dumbly by. Vick, to whose faith all things seem possible, runs sharply barking and racing after it. We both laugh at the fruitlessness of her undertaking, and the joint merriment restores suavity to me, and assurance to him.

"And are you to stay here by yourself *all* the time he is away—*all?*"

"God forbid!" reply I, with devout force.

"Not? well, then—I am really afraid this is a question again, but I cannot help it. If you will not volunteer information, I must ask for it—who is to be your companion?"

"I suppose they will take turns," say I, relapsing into dejection, as I think of the precarious nature of the society on which I depend; "sometimes one, sometimes another, whichever can get away best—they will take turns."

"And who is to have the *first* turn?" he asks, leaning back in the corner of the seat, so as to have a fuller view of my lamentable profile; "when is the first installment of consolatory relatives to arrive?"

"Algy and Barbara *were* to have come today," reply I, feeling a covert resentment against something of faintly *gibing* in his tone, but being conscious that it is not perceptible enough to justify another snub, even if I had one ready, which I have not.

"And they did not?"

"Now, is not that a silly question?" cry I, tartly, venting the crossness born of my desolation on the only person within reach; "if they *had*, should I be sitting moping here with nobody but Vick to talk to?"

"You forget *me!* may not I run in couples even with a *dog?*" he asks, with a little bitter laugh.

"I did not forget you," reply I, coolly; "but you do not affect the question one way or another—you will be gone directly, and—when you are—"

"Thank you for the hint," he cries, springing up, picking up his little stick off the grass and flushing.

"You are not going?" cry I, eagerly, laying my hand on his coat-sleeve, "do not! why should you? there is no hurry. Let me have some one to help me to keep the ghosts at bay as long as I can!" then with a dim consciousness of having said something rather *odd*, I add, reddening, "I shall be going in directly, and you may go then."

He reseats himself. A tiny air is ruffling the flower-beds, giving a separate soft good-night to each bloom.

"And what happened to Algy and Barbara?" he says, presently.

"Happened? Nothing!" I answer, absently.

"Very brutal of Algy and Barbara, then!" he says, more in the way of a reflection than a remark.

"Very brutal of *father*, you should say!" reply I, roused by the thought of my parent to a fresh attack of active and lively resentment.

"I have no doubt I should if I knew him."

"He would not let them come!" say I, explanatorily, "for what reason? for *none*—he never has any reasons, or, if he has, he does not give them. I sometimes think" (laughing maliciously) "that *you* will not be unlike him, when you grow old and gouty."

"Thank you."

"*You* have no father, have you?" continue I, presently; "no, I remember your telling me so at the Linkesches Bad. Well" (laughing again, with a certain grim humor), I would not fret about it *too* much, if I were you—it is a relationship that has its disadvantages."

He laughs a little dryly.

"On whatever other heads I may quarrel with Providence, at least no one can accuse me of ever murmuring at its decrees in this respect."

We have risen. The darkness creeps on apace, warmly, without damp or chillness; but still on it comes! I have to face the prospect of my great and gloomy house all through the lagging hours of the long, black night!

"They will come to-morrow, *certainly*, I suppose?" (interrogatively).

"Not *certainly*, at all!" reply I, with an energetic despondence in my voice; "quite the contrary! most likely not! most likely not the day after either, nor the day after that—"

"And if they do not" (with an accent of sincere compassion), "what will you do?"

"What I have done to-day, I suppose," I answer, dejectedly; "cry till my cheeks are *sore!* You may not believe me" (passing my bare fingers lightly over them as I speak), "but they feel quite *raw*. I wonder" (with a little dismal laugh) "why tears were made *salt!*—they would not blister one-half so much if they were fresh water."

He has drawn a pace or two nearer to me. In this light one has to look closely at any object that one wishes specially and narrowly to observe; and I myself have pointed out the peculiarities of my countenance to him, so I cannot complain if he scrutinizes me with a lengthy attention.

"It is going to be such a *dark* night!" I say, with a slight shiver; "and if the wind gets up, I know that I shall lie awake all night thinking that the gen—that Roger is drowned! Do not you think" (looking round apprehensively) "that it is rising already? See how those boughs are waving!"

"Not an atom!" reassuringly.

We both look for an instant at the silent flower-beds, at the sombre bulk of the house.

"If they do not come to-morrow—"begins Frank.

"But they *will!*" cry I, petulantly; "they *must!* I cannot do without them! I believe some people do not *mind* being alone—not even in the evenings, when the furniture cracks and the door-handles rattle. I dare say *you* do not; but I hate my own company; I have never been used to it. I have always been used to a great deal of noise—*too* much, I have sometimes thought, but I am sure that I never shall think so again!"

"Well, but if they do not—"

"You have said that three times," cry I, irritably. "You seem to take a pleasure in saying it. If they do not—well, what?"

"I will not say what I was going to say," he answers, shortly. "I shall only get my nose bitten off if I do."

"Very well, do not!" reply I, with equal suavity.

We walk in silence toward the house, the wet grass is making my long gown drenched and flabby. We have reached the garden-door whence I issued, and by which I shall return.

"You must go now, I suppose," say I, reluctantly. "*You* will be by yourself, too, will not you? Tell me" (speaking with lowered, confidential tone), "do *your* chairs and tables ever make odd noises?"

"Awful!" he answers, laughing. "I can hardly hear myself speak for them."

I laugh, too.

"You might as well tell me before you go what the remark that I quenched was? One always longs to hear the things that people are *going* to say, and do not.! Have no fear! your nose is quite safe!"

"It is nothing much," he answers, with self-conscious stiffness, looking down and poking about the little dark pebbles with his cane; "nothing that you would care about."

"*Care about!*" echo I, leaning my back against the dusk house-wall, and staring up at the sombre purple of the sky. "Well, no! I dare say not! What *should* I care to hear now? I am sure I should be puzzled to say! But, as I have been so near it, I may as well be told."

"As you will," he answers, with an air of affected carelessness. "It is only that, if they *do not* come to-morrow—"

"*Fourth time!*" interject I, counting on my fingers and smiling.

"If you *wish*—if you *like*—if it would be any comfort to you—I shall be happy—I mean I shall be very glad to come up again about the same time to-morrow evening."

"*Will* you?" (eagerly, with a great accession of exhilaration in my voice). "Are you serious? I shall be so much obliged if you will, but—"

"It is *impossible* that any one can say any thing," he interrupts, hastily. "There *could* be no harm in it!"

"*Harm!*" repeat I, laughing. "Well, *hardly!* I cannot fancy a more innocent amusement."

Though my speech is in agreement with his own, the coincidence does not seem to gratify him.

"What did you mean, then?" he says, sharply. "You said 'but'—"

"Did I?" answer I, again throwing back my head, and looking upward, as if trying to trace my last preposition among the clouds; "but—*but*—where could I have put a '*but?*'—Oh, I know! *but* you will most likely forget! Do not!" I continue, bringing down my eyes again, and speaking in a coaxing tone. "If you do, it will be play to you, but *death* to me; the thought of it will keep me up all the day!"

"Will it?" in a tone of elated eagerness. "You are not *gibing*, I suppose? it does not sound like your gibing voice!"

"Not it!" reply I, gloomily. "My gibing voice is packed away at the bottom of my imperial. I do not think it has been out since we left Dresden. Well, good-night! What do you want to shake hands *again* for? We have done that *twice* already. You are like the man who, the moment he had finished reading prayers to his family, began them all over again. *Mind* you do not forget! and" (laughing) "if you cannot come yourself, *send some one else! any one* will do—I am not particular, but I *must* have *some one* to speak to!"

Almost before my speech is finished, Frank is out of sight. With such rapid suddenness has he disappeared round the house-corner. I stand for a moment, marveling a little at his hurry. Five minutes ago he seemed willing enough to dawdle on till midnight. Then I go in, and forget his existence.

CHAPTER XXII.

Suppose that in all this world, during all its ages, there never was a case of a person being *always* in an ill-humor. I believe that even Xantippe had her lucid intervals of amiability, during which she fondled her Socrates. At all events, father has. On the day after my disappointment, one such interval occurs. He relents, allows Algy and Barbara to have the carriage, and sends them off to Tempest.

Either Mr. Musgrave becomes aware of this fact, or, as I had anticipated, he forgets his promise, for he never appears, and I do not see him again till Sunday. By Sunday my cheeks are no longer *raw;* the furniture has stopped cracking—seeing that no one paid any attention to it, it wisely left off—and the ghosts await a fitter opportunity to pounce.

I have heard from Sir Roger—a cheerful note, dated Southampton. If *he* is cheerful, I may surely allow myself to be so too. I therefore no longer compunctiously strangle any stray smiles that visit my countenance. I have taken several drives with Barbara in my new pony-carriage—it is a curious sensation being able to order it without being subject to father's veto—and we have skirted our own park, and have peeped through his close wooden palings at Mr. Musgrave's, have strained our eyes and stretched our necks to catch a glimpse of his old gray house, nestling low down among its elms. (Was there ever an abbey that did not live in a hollow?) With bated breath, lest the groom behind should overhear me, I have lightly sketched to Barbara the outline of an idea for establishing her in that weather-worn old pile—an idea which I think was born in my mind as long ago as the first evening that I saw its owner at the Linkesches Bad, and heard that he *had* an abbey, and that it was over against my future home.

Barbara does not altogether deny the desirability of the arrangement; she is not, however, so sanguine as I as to its feasibility, and she positively declines to consent to enter actively into it until she has seen him. This will be on Sunday. To Sunday, therefore, I look forward with pious haste.

Well, it is Sunday now—the Sunday of my first appearance as a bride at Tempest church. A bride without her bridegroom! A pang of mortification and pain shoots through me, as this thought traverses my soul. I look at myself dissatisfiedly in the glass. Alas! I am no credit to his taste." If, for this once, I could but look taller, personabler, *older!*

"They will all say that he has made a fool of himself," I say, half aloud.

It is a sultry day, without wind or freshness, and with a great deal of sun; but, in spite of this, I put on a silk gown, rich and heavy, as looking more *married* than the cobweb muslins in which I have hitherto met the summer heat. On my head I place a sedately feathered bonnet, which would not have misbecome mother. I meet Algy and Barbara in my boudoir. They are already dressed. I examine Barbara with critical care, and with a discontented eye, though to a stranger her appearance would seem likely to inspire any feeling rather than dissatisfaction, for she looks as clean and fair and chastely sweet as ever maiden did. Ben Jonson must have known some one like her when he wrote:

"Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of the beaver
Or swan's-down ever?
Or have smelled of the bud of the brier,
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
Oh so white, oh so soft, oh so sweet is she!"

But all the same, having a bonnet on, she is distinctly less like Palma Vecchio's St. Catherine, to which in my talk with Frank I compared her, than she was bareheaded this morning at breakfast. Who in the annals of history ever heard of a saint in a *bonnet?*

I wish that people might be allowed to go to church without their bonnets these hot Sundays," I say, grumblingly. "*You* especially, Barbara."

She laughs.

"I should be very glad, but I am afraid the beadle would turn me out."

"For Heaven's sake," says Algy, gravely, putting back his shoulders and throwing out his chest, as he draws on a pair of exact gray gloves, "do not let us make ourselves to stink in the nostrils of the inhabitants by any eccentricities of conduct, on this our first introduction to them. If we consulted our own comfort, there is no doubt that we should reduce our toilets by a good many more articles than bonnet—in fact—" (with an air of reflection), "I shudder to think *where* we should stop!"

We are in church now. I have run the gantlet of the observation of all the parishioners, and have been unable to look calmly unaware of it; on the contrary, have grown consciously rosy red, and have walked over hastily between the open sittings. But now I have reached the shelter of our own seat, near the top of the church, with all the gay bonnets behind me, and only the pulpit, the spread-eagle reading-desk, and the gaudy stained window in front. As soon as I am established —almost sooner, perhaps—I turn my eyes in search of Mr. Musgrave. I know perfectly where to look for him, as he drew a plan of Tempest church and the relative position of our sittings, with the point of his stick on the gravel in the gardens close to the Zwinger at Dresden, while we sat under the trees by the little pool, feeding the pert sparrows and the intimate cock-chaffinch that resort thither. He is not there!

Barbara may be crowned with any abomination, in the way of a bonnet, that ever entered into the grotesque imagination of a milliner to conceive—coal-scuttle, cottage, spoon —for all that it matters. The organ strikes up, a file of chorister-boys in dirty surplices —Tempest is a more pretentious church than ours — and a brace of clergy enter. All through the Confession I gape about with vacant inattention—at the grimy whiteness of the choir; at the back of the organist's head, at the parson, a mealy-mouthed fledgling, who, with his finger on his place in the prayer to prevent his losing it, is taking a stealthy inventory of my charms.

Suddenly I hear the door, which has been for some time silent, creak again in opening. Footsteps sound along the aisle. I look up. Yes, it is he! walking as quickly and noiselessly as he can, and looking rather ashamed of himself, while patches of red, blue, and golden light, from the east window, dance on his Sunday coat and on the smooth darkness of his hair. I glance at Barbara, to give her notice of the approach of her destiny, but my glance is lost. Barbara's stooped head is hidden by her hands, and her pure thoughts are away with God. As a *pis aller*, I look at Algy. No absorption in prayer on *his* part baffles me. He is leaning his elbow on his knee, and wearily biting the top of his prayer-book. He returns my look by another, which, though wordless, is eloquent. It says, in

raised eyebrow and drooped mouth, "Is that all? I do not think much of him!"

The church is full and hot. The windows are open, indeed, but only the infinitesimally small chink that church-windows ever do open. The pew-opener sedulously closes the great door after every fresh entrance. I kneel simmering through the Litany. Never before did it seem so long! Never did the chanted, "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!" appear so endlessly numerous.

Under cover of my arched hands, shading my eyes, I peep at one after another of the family groups. Most of them are behind me indeed, but there are still a good many that I can get a view of sideways. Among these, the one that oftenest engages my notice is a small white woman, evidently a lady—and, at the moment I first catch sight of her, with closed eyes and drawn-in nostrils, inhaling smelling-salts, as if to her, too, church was up-hill work this morning—in a little seat by herself. At the other pews one glance a piece satisfies me, but, having looked at *her* once, I look again. I could not tell you *why* I do it. There is nothing very remarkable about her in the matter of either youth or beauty, and yet I look.

The service is ended at length, but eagerly as I long for the fresh air, we are—whether to mark our own dignity, or to avoid further scrutiny on the part of our fellow-worshipers—almost the last to issue from the church. At the porch we find Mr. Musgrave waiting. A sort of *mauvaise honte* and a guilty conscience combine to disable me from promptly introducing him to my people, and, before I recover my presence of mind, Algy has walked on with Barbara, and I am left to follow with Frank.

He does not seem in one of his most sunshiny humors, but perhaps the long morning service, so trying in its present arrangement of lengthy prayers, praises, and preaching, to a restless and irritable temper, is to blame for that.

"I suppose," he says, speaking rather stiffly, "that I must congratulate you on the arrival of the first detachment."

"First detachment of what?"

"Of your family. I understood you to say that there were to be *relays* of them during all Sir Roger's absence."

"It is to be hoped so, I am sure," I say, devoutly; "especially" (looking up at him with mock reproach) "considering the way in which my friends neglect me. You never came, after all! No!" (seeing the utter unsmilingness of his expression, and speaking hastily), "I am not serious; I am only joking! No doubt you heard that they had come, and thought that you would be in the way. But, indeed you would not. We had no secrets to talk; we should not have minded you a bit."

"I *did* hear that they had arrived," he answers, speaking ungraciously, "but even if I had not, I should not have come!"

I look up in his face, and laugh.

"You *forgot?* Ah, I told you you would!"

"I did *not* forget."

Again I look up at him, this time in honest astonishment, awaiting the solution of his enigma.

"There is no particular use in making one's self *cheap*, is there?" he says, with a bitter little laugh. "What is the use of going to a place where you are told that *any one else* will do as well?"

A pause. I walk along in wonderment. So he actually was happy again! We have left the church-yard. We are in the road, between the dusty quicks of the hedgerows. The carriages bowl past us, whirling clouds of dust down our throats. One is trotting by now, a victoria and pair of grays, and in it, leaning restfully back, and holding up her parasol, is the lady I noticed in church. Musgrave knows her apparently. At least, he takes off his hat.

"Who is she?" I say, with a slightly aroused interest. "I was wondering in church. I suppose she is delicate, as she sat down through the Psalms."

At the moment I address him, Mr. Musgrave is battling angrily with an angrier wasp, but no sooner has he heard my question than he ceases his warfare and allows it to buzz within half an inch of his nose, as he turns his hazel eyes, full of astonished inquiry, upon me.

"You *do not know?*"

"Not I," reply I, lightly. "How should I? I know nobody in these parts."

"That is Mrs. Huntley."

"You do not say so!" reply I, ironically.

"I am sure I am very glad to hear it, but I am not very much wiser than I was before."

"Is it possible," he says, looking rather nettled at my tone, and lowering his voice a little, as if anxious to confine the question to me alone—a needless precaution, as there is no one else within hearing—"that you have *never* heard of her?"

"Never!" reply I, in some surprise; "why should I?—has she ever done any thing very remarkable?"

He laughs slightly, but disagreeably.

"Remarkable! well, no, I suppose not!"

The victoria is quite out of sight now—quite out of sight the delicately poised head, the dove-colored parasol.

"You are joking, of course," says Frank, presently, turning toward me, and still speaking in that needlessly lowered key. "It is so long since I have seen you, that I have got out of the habit of remembering that you never speak seriously; but, *of course*, you have heard—I mean Sir Roger has mentioned her to you!"

"He has not," reply I, speaking sharply, and raising my voice a little. "Neither has he mentioned any of the other neighbors to me! He had not time." No rejoinder. "Most likely," continue I, speaking with quick heat, for something in his manner galls me, "he did not recollect her existence."

"Most likely."

He is looking down at the white dust which is defiling his patent-leather boots, and smiling slightly.

"How do you know—what reason have you for thinking that he was aware that there was such a person?" I ask, with injudicious eagerness.

"I have no reason—I think nothing," he answers coldly, with an air of ostentatious reserve.

I walk on in a ruffled, jarred silence. Presently Frank speaks again.

"Are those two"—(slightly indicating by a faint nod the figures in front of us)—"the two you expected?—Are these—what are their names?—*Algy* and *Barbara?*"

"Yes," say I, smiling, with recovered equanimity; "Algy and Barbara." A little pause. "You can judge for yourself now," say I, laughing rather nervously, "whether I spoke truth—whether Barbara is as like the St. Catherine as I told you." For a moment he does not answer. "Of course," I say, rather crestfallen, "the bonnet makes a difference; the likeness is much more striking when it is off."

"The St. Catherine!" he repeats, with a puzzled air, "*what* St. Catherine? I am afraid you will think me very stupid, but I really am quite at sea."

"Do you mean to say," cry I, reddening with mortification, "that you forget—that you do not remember that St. Catherine of Palma Vecchio's in the Dresden Gallery that I always pointed out to you as having such a look of Barbara? Well, you *have* a short memory!"

"Have I," he answers, dryly; "perhaps for *some* things; for *others*, I fancy that mine is a good deal longer than yours."

"It might easily be that," I answer, recovering from my temporary annoyance and laughing; "I suppose you mean for books and dates, and things of that kind. Well, you may easily beat me there. The landing of William the Conqueror, and the battle of Waterloo, were the only two dates I ever succeeded in mastering, and that was only after the struggle of years."

"Dates!" he says, impatiently, "pshaw! I was not thinking of *them!* I was thinking of Dresden!"

"Are you so sure that you could beat me there?" asked I, thoughtfully; "I do not know about that! I think I could stand a pretty stiff examination; but perhaps you are talking of the pictures and the names of the artists. Ah, yes! there you are right; with *me* they go in at one ear and out at another. Only the other day I was racking my brain to think of the name of the man that painted the *other* Magdalen—not Guido's—I was telling Algy about it. Bah! what is it? I know it as well as my own."

His head is turned away from me. He does not appear to be attending.

"What is it?" I repeat; "have *you* forgotten too?"

"Battoni!" he answers, laconically, still keeping his face averted.

"*Battoni!* oh, yes! thanks—of course! so it is!—Algy"—(raising my voice a little)—"*Battoni!*"

"Well, what about him?" replies Algy, turning his head, but not showing much inclination to slacken his speed or to join Frank and me.

"The Magdalen man—you know—I mean the man that painted the Magdalen, and whose name I could not recollect last night, Algy—Barbara, how fast you are walking?"—speaking rather reproachfully)—"stop a moment! I want to introduce you to Mr. Musgrave."

Thus adjured, they have to come to a halt, and the presentation is made.

"Surely," think I, glancing at Barbara's face, slightly flushed by the heat, and still gently grave with the sobriety of expression left by devotion, "he *must* see the likeness now!" To insure his having the chance of telling her that he does, I fall behind with Algy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Claret cup has washed the dust from our throats; cold lamb and mayonnaise have restored the force of body and equanimity of mind which the exhausted air and long-drawn Gregorian chants of Tempest Church destroyed. Frank is lunching with us. He had accompanied us to our gates, and had then made a feint of leaving, but I had pressed him, with an eagerness proportioned to the seriousness of my design upon him, to accompany us, and he had yielded with a willing ease.

I cannot help thinking that Algy does not look altogether pleased with the arrangement, but, after all, it is *my* house, and not Algy's. It is the first time that I have entertained a guest since the far-off childish birthdays, when the neighbors' little boys and girls used to be gathered together to drink tea out of the doll's tea service. In the afternoon we all walk to church again, and in the same order. Barbara and Algy in front, Frank and I behind. I had planned differently, but Algy is obtuse. Barbara will not come into the manœuvres, and Frank seems simply indifferent. So it happens, that all through the park, and up the bit of dusty white road we are out of ear-shot of the other two.

"A sky worthy of Dresden!" says Mr. Musgrave, throwing back his head and looking up at the pale blue sultriness above our heads—the waveless, stormless ether sea—as we pace along, with the church-bells' measured ding-dong in our ears, and the cool ripe grasses about our feet.

"*Dear* Dresden!" say I, pensively, with a sigh of mixed regret and remorse, as I look back on the sunshiny hours that at the time I thought so long, in that fair, white foreign town.

"Dear Linkesches Bad!" says Frank, sighing too.

"Dear Groosegarten!" cry I, thinking of the long pottering stroll that Roger and I had taken one evening up and down its green alleys, and that *then* I had found so tedious.

"Dear Zwinger!" retorts Frank.

"Dear Weisserhirsch!" say I, half sadly. "Dear white acacias! dear drives under the acacias!"

"*Drives under the acacias!*" echoes Frank, dropping his accent of sentimentalism, and speaking rather sharply. "We never had any drives under the acacias! We never had any drives at all, that I recollect!"

"*You* had not, I dare say," reply I, carelessly, "but *we* had. They are the things that I look back at with the greatest pleasure of any thing that happened there!"

Frank does not apostrophize as "*dear*" any other public resort; indeed, he turns away his head, and we walk on without uttering a word for a few moments.

"By-the-by," say I, with a labored and not altogether successful attempt at appearing to speak with suddenness and want of premeditation, "what did you mean this morning, about that la—about Mrs. Huntley?"

"I meant nothing," he answers, but the faint quiver of a smile about his mouth contradicts his words.

"That is not true!" reply I, with impatient brusqueness; "why were you surprised at my not having heard of her?"

"I was not surprised."

"What is the use of so many falsehoods?" cry I, indignantly; "at least I would choose some better time than when I was going to church for telling them. What reason have you for supposing that—that Roger knows more about her than I—than Barbara do?"

"How persistent you are!" he says, with that same peculiar smile—not latent now, but

developed—curbing his lips and lightening in his eyes. "There is no baffling you! Since you dislike falsehoods, I will tell you no more. I will own to you that I made a slip of the tongue; I took it for granted that you had been told a certain little history, which it seems you have *not* been told."

The blood rushes headlong to my face. It feels as if every drop in my body were throbbing and tingling in my cheeks, but I look back at him hardily.

"I don't believe there *is* any such history."

"I dare say not."

More silence. Swish through the buttercups and the yellow rattle; a lark, miles above our heads, singing the music he has overheard in heaven. Frank does not seem inclined to speak again.

"Your story is *not* true," say I, presently, laughing uncomfortably, and unable to do the one wise thing in my reach, and leave the subject alone—"but untrue stories are often amusing, more amusing than the true ones. You may tell yours, if you like."

"I have not the slightest wish."

A few steps more. How quickly we are getting through the park! We shall reach the church, and I shall not have heard. I shall sit and stand and kneel all through the service with the pain of that gnawing curiosity—that hateful new vague jealousy aching at my heart.

It is *impossible!* I stop. I stand stock-still in the summer grass.

"I *hate* your hints! I hate your innuendoes!" I say, passionately. "I have always lived with people who spoke their thoughts straight out! Tell me this moment! I will not move a step from this spot till you do."

"I have nothing worth speaking of to tell," he answers, slightly. "It is only that, never having had a wife myself, I have taken an outsider's view; I have taken it for granted that when two people marry each other they make a clean breast of their past history—make a mutual confession of their former—"

He pauses, as if in search of a word.

"But supposing," cry I, eagerly, "that they have nothing to tell, nothing to confess—"

He shrugs his shoulders.

"That is so likely, is it not?"

"Likely or not," cry I, excitedly, "it was true in *my* case. If you had put me on the rack, I could have confessed nothing!"

"I do not see the analogy," he answers, coldly; "*you* are—what did you tell me? nineteen?—It is to be supposed"—(with a rather unlovely smile)—"that your history is yet to come; and he is—*forty-seven!* We shall be late for church!"—with a glance at Algy's and Barbara's quickly diminishng figures.

"I do not care whether we are late or not!" cry I, vehemently, and stamping on the daisy-heads as I speak. "I will not *stir* until you tell me."

"There is really no need for such excitement!" returns he, with a cold smile; "since you will have it, it is only that rumor—and you know what a liar *rumor* is—says that once, some years ago, they were engaged to marry each other."

"And why did not they?" speaking with breathless panting, and forgetting my stout asseveration that the whole tale is a lie.

"Because—mind, I *vouch* for nothing, I am only quoting rumor again—because—she threw him over."

"*Threw him over!*" with an accent of most unfeigned astonishment.

"You are surprised!" he says, quickly, and with what sounds to me like a slightly annoyed inflection of voice; "it *does* seem incredible, does not it? But at that time, you see, he had not all the desirables—not quite the pull over other men that he has now; his brother was not dead or likely to die, and he was only General Tempest, with nothing much besides his pay."

"*Threw—him—over!*" repeat I, slowly, as if unable yet to grasp the sense of the phrase.

"We shall *certainly* be late; the last bell is beginning," says Frank, impatiently.

I move slowly on. We have reached the turnstile that gives issue from the park to the road. The smart farmers' wives, the rosy farmers' daughters, are pacing along through the powdery dust toward the church-gate.

"Is she a *widow?*" ask I, in a low voice.

He laughs sarcastically.

"A widow indeed, and desolate, eh! No! I believe she has a husband somewhere about, but she keeps him well out of sight—away in the colonies. He is there now, I fancy."

"And why is she not with him?" cry I, indignantly; but the moment that the words are out of my mouth, I hang my head. Might not *she* ask the same question with regard to *me?*

"She did not like the *sea*, perhaps," answers Frank, demurely.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DAY—two days pass.

"More callers," say I, hearing the sound of wheels, and running to the window; "I thought we *must* have exhausted the neighborhood yesterday and the day before!" I add, sighing.

"*Whoever they are*," says Barbara, anxiously, lifting her head from the work over which it is bent, "mind you do not ask after their relations! Think of the man whose wife you inquired after, and found that she had run away with his groom not a month before!"

"That certainly was one of my unlucky things," answer I, gravely; then, beginning to laugh—"and I was so *determined* to know what had become of her, too."

I am still looking out. It is a soft, smoke-colored day; half an hour ago, there was a shower—each drop a separate loud patter on the sycamore-leaves—but now it is fair again. A victoria is coming briskly up the drive; servants in dark liveries; a smoke-colored parasol that matches the day.

"Shall I ring, and say 'not at home?'" asks Barbara, stretching out her hand toward the bell.

"No, no!" cry I, hurriedly, in an altered voice, for the parasol has moved a little aside, and I have seen the face beneath.

In two minutes the butler enters and announces "Mrs. Huntley," and the "plain woman—not very young—about thirty—who cannot be very strong, as she sat down through the Psalms," enters.

At first she seems uncertain *which* to greet as bride and hostess; indeed, I can see that her earliest impulse is to turn from the small insignificance in silk, to the tall little loveliness in cotton, and, as I perceive it, a little arrow—not of jealousy, for, thank God, I never was jealous of our Barbara—never—but of pain at my so palpable inferiority, shoots through all my being. But Barbara draws back, and our visitor perceives her error. We sit down, but the brunt of the talk falls on Barbara. I am never glib with strangers, and I throw in a word only now and then, all my attention and observation having passed into my eyes. A plain woman, indeed! I have always been convinced of the unbecomingness of church, but *now* more than ever am I fully persuaded of it. And yet she is not pretty! Her mouth is very wide, that is perhaps why she so rarely laughs; her nose cannot say much for itself; her cheeks are thin, and I *think*—nay, let me tell truth—I *hope* that in a low gown she would be *scraggy*, so slight even to meagreness is she! But how thoroughly made the most of! What a shapeless pin-cushion fit my gown seems beside the admirable French sit of hers! How hard, how metallic its tint beside the indefinite softness of that sweep of smoke-color! What a stiff British erection my hair feels beside the careless looseness of these shining twists! What a fine, slight hand, as if cut in faint gray stone!

At each fresh detail that I note, Musgrave's anecdote gains ever more and more probability; and my heart sinks ever lower and more low.

One hope remains to me. Perhaps she may be stupid! Certainly she is not *affording*.

How heavily poor Barbara is driving through the fine weather and the *Times!* and how little more than "yes" and "no" does she get! I take heart. Roger loves people who talk—people who are merry and make jests. It was my most worthless gabble that first drew him toward me. Cheered and emboldened by this thought, I swoop down like a sudden eagle to the rescue.

"You know Rog—, my husband, do not you?" I say, with an abrupt bluntness that contrasts finely with the languid gentleness with which her little remarks steal out like mice. *Mine* rushes forth like a desolating bomb-shell.

"A little—yes."

"You knew him in India, did not you?" say I, unable to resist the temptation of seizing this opportunity to gratify my curiosity,

drawing my chair a little nearer hers, and speaking with an eagerness which I, in vain, try to stifle.

"Yes," smiling sweetly, "in India."

"He was there a long time," continue I, communicatively.

"Yes."

(Well, she *is* baffling! when she does not say "yes" affirmatively, she says it interrogatively.)

"All the same he did not like it," I go on, with amicable volubility; "but I dare say you know that. They say—" (reddening, as I feel, perceptibly, and nervously twisting my pocket-handkerchief round my fingers)—"that people are so sociable in India: now, I dare say you saw a good deal of him."

"Yes; we met several times."

She is smiling again. There is not a shade of hesitation or unreadiness in her low voice, nor does the faintest tinge of color stain the fine pallor of her cheeks.

(It *must* have been a lie!)

"*Your* husband, too, is out—" I pause; not sure of the locality, but she does not help me, so I add lamely, "*somewhere*, is not he?"

"He is in the West Indies."

"In the West Indies," cry I, with animation, drawing my chair yet a little nearer hers, and feeling positively friendly; "why, that is where *mine* is too!"

"Yes?"

"We are companions in misfortune," cry I, heartily; "we must keep up each other's spirits, must not we?"

Another smile, but no verbal answer.

A noise of feet coming across the hall—of manly whistling—makes itself heard. The door opens and Algy enters. It is clear that he is unaware of there being any stranger present, for his hat is on his head, his hands are in his pockets, and he only stops whistling to observe:

"Well, Nancy! any more aborigines?" then he breaks suddenly off, and we all grow red—he himself beaming of as lively a scarlet as the new tunic that he tried on last night. I make a hurried and confused presentation, in which I manage to slur over into unintelligibility and utter doubtfulness the names of the two people made known to one another.

"One more aborigine, you see!" says Mrs. Huntley, to my surprise—after the experience I have had of her fine taste in monosyllables—beginning the conversation. I look at her with a little wonder. Her voice is quite as low as ever, but there is an accent of playfulness in it; and on her face a sparkle of *esprit*, whose possible existence I had not conjectured. Certainly, she showed no symptom of playfulness or *esprit* during our late talk. I have yet to learn that to some women the presence of a man—not *the* man, but *a* man—any man—is what warm rain is to flowers athirst. I am still marveling at this metamorphosis, when the door again opens, and another guest is announced—an old man, as great a stranger to us as is the rest of the neighborhood, but of whom we quickly discover that he is deadly, deadly deaf. For five minutes, I bawl at him a series of remarks, each and all of which he misunderstands. He does it so invariably, that I come at length to the conclusion that he is doing it on purpose, and stop talking in a huff. Then Barbara takes her turn—Barbara can always make deaf people hear better than I do, though she does not speak to them nearly so loud, and I rest on my oars. Owing to my position between the two couples, I can hear what is passing between Algy and Mrs. Huntley.

To tell the truth, I do not take much pains to avoid hearing it, for surely they can have no secrets. They are sitting rather close together, and speaking in a somewhat low key, but I am so used to *his* voice, and her articulation is so distinct, that I do not miss a word.

"I think I had the pleasure of seeing you in church last Sunday," Algy says, rather diffidently; not having yet quite recovered from the humiliation engendered by his unfortunate remark.

She nods.

"And I you," with a gently reassuring smile.

"Did you, really? did you see me—I mean us?"

"Yes, I saw you," with a delicate inflection of voice, which somehow confines the application of the remark to him. "I made up my mind—one takes ideas into one's head, you know—I made up my mind that you were a *soldier;* one can mostly tell."

He laughs the flattered, fluttered laugh, that *my* rough speech was never known to provoke in living man.

"Yes, I am; at least, I am going to be; I join this week."

"Yes?" with a pretty air of attention and interest.

"We—we—found out who *you* were," he says, laughing again, with a little embarrassment, and edging his chair nearer hers; "we asked Musgrave!"

"Mr. Musgrave!" (with a little tone of alert curiosity)—"oh! you know *him?*"

"I know him! I should think so: he is quite a tame cat here."

"Yes?"

"Have you any *children?*" cry I, suddenly, bundling with my usual fine tact headforemost into the conversation (where I am clearly not wanted, and altogether forgetting Barbara's warning injunction) with my unnecessary and malapropos query. For a moment she looks only astonished; then an expression of pain crosses her face, and a slight contraction passes over her features. Evidently, she *had* a child, and it is *dead.* She is going to *cry!* At this awful thought I grow scarlet, and Algy darts a furious look at me. What *have* I said? I have outdone myself. How far worse a case than the fugitive wife whose destiny I was so resolute to learn from her injured husband!

"I am so sorry," I stammer—"I never thought—I did not know—"

"It is of no consequence," she answers, speaking with some difficulty, and with a slight but quite musical tremor in her voice—very different from the ugly gulpings and catchings of the breath which always set off *my* tears—"but the fact is, that I *have* one little one—and—and—she no longer lives with me; my husband's people have taken her; I am sure that they meant it for the best; only—only—I am afraid I cannot quite manage to talk of her yet" (turning away from me, and looking up into Algy's face with a showery smile). Then, as if unable to run the risk of any other further shock to her feelings, she rises and takes her leave, Algy eagerly attending her to the door.

The old deaf gentleman departs at the same time, loading Barbara with polite parting messages to her husband, and bowing distantly to *me.* Algy reënters presently, looking cross and ruffled.

"You really are *too* bad, Nancy!" he says, harshly, throwing himself into the chair lately occupied by Mrs. Huntley. "You grow worse every day—one would think you did it on purpose—riding rough-shod over people's feelings."

I stand aghast. Formerly I used not to mind rough words; but I think Roger must have spoilt me; they make me wince now.

"But—but—it was not *dead!*" I say, whimpering; "it had only gone to visit its grandmother."

"Never you mind, my Nancy!" says Barbara, in a whisper, drawing me away to the window, and pressing her soft, cool lips, to the flushed misery of my cheeks; "she was not hurt a bit! her eyes were as dry as a bone!"

CHAPTER XXV.

One more day is gone. We are one day nearer Roger's return. This is the way in which I am growing to look at the flight of time; just as, in Dresden, I joyfully marked each sunset, as bringing me twenty-four hours nearer home and the boys. And now the boys are within reach; at a wish I could have them all round me; and still, in my thoughts, I hurry the slow days, and blame them for dawdling. With all their broad, gold sunshine, and their rainbow-colored flowers, I wish them away.

Alas! that life should be both so quick and so lagging! It is afternoon, and I am lying by myself on a cloak at the bottom of the punt—the *unupsettable* broad-bottomed punt. My elbow rests on the seat, and a book is on my lap. But, in the middle of the pool, the glare from the water is unbearably bright, but *here,* underneath those dripping, drooped trees, the sun only filters through in little flakes, and the shade is brown, and the reflections are so vivid that the flags hardly know which are themselves—they, or the other flags that grow in the water at their feet.

A while ago I tried to read; but a private vexation of my own—a small new one—interleaved with its details each page of the story, and made nonsense of it. I have shut the volume, therefore, and, with my hat tilted over my eyes, and my cheek on my hand, am

watching the long blue dragon-flies, and the numberless small peoples that inhabit the summer air. All at once I hear some one coming, crashing and pushing through the woody undergrowth. Perhaps it is Algy come to say that he has changed his mind, and that he will not go after all! No! it is only Mr. Musgrave. I am a little disappointed, but, as my fondness for my own company is always of the smallest, I am able to smile a sincere welcome.

"It is you, is it?" I say, with a little intimate nod. "How did you know where I was?"

"Barbara told me."

"*Barbara*, indeed!" (laughing). "I wish father could hear you."

"I am very glad he does not."

"And so you found her at home?" I say, with a feeling of pleased curiosity, as to the details of the interview. (He cannot well have volunteered the abbey *already*, can he?)

"I suppose I may come in," he says, hardly waiting my permission to jump into the punt, which, however, by reason of the noble broadness of its bottom, is enabled to bid defiance to any such shock. "She was making a flannel petticoat for an old woman," he goes on, sitting down opposite me, and looking at me from under his hat-brim, with gravely shining eyes; "*herring-boning*, she called it. She has been teaching me how to herring-bone. I like Barbara."

"How kind of you!" I say, ironically, and yet a little gratified too. "And does she return the compliment, may I ask?"

He nods.

"Yes, I think so."

"She would like you better still if you were to lose all your money, and one of your legs, and be marked by the small-pox," I say, thoughtfully; "to be despised, and out at elbows, and down in the world, is the sure way to Barbara's heart."

I had meant to have drawn for him a pleasant and yet most true picture of her sweet disinterestedness, but his uneasy vanity takes it amiss.

"As it entails being enrolled among the blind and lame," he says, smiling sarcastically, and flushing a little, "I am afraid I shall never get there."

A moment ago I had felt hardly less than sisterly toward him. Now I look at him with a disgustful and disapprobative eye. What a very great deal of alteration he needs, and, with that face, and his abbey, and all his rooks to back it, how very unlikely he is to get it! Well, *I* at least will do my best!

We both remain quiet for a few moments. Vick sits at the end of the punt, a shiver of excitement running all over her little white body, her black nose quivering, and one lip slightly lifted by a tooth, as she gazes with eager gravity at the distant wild-ducks flying along in a row, with outstretched necks, making their pleasant quacks. How low they fly; so low that their feet splash in the water, that makes a bright spray-hue in the sun!

"Algy is going away to-morrow!" say I, presently.

"So he told me."

"This is his last evening here!" (in a rather dolorous tone).

"So I should gather," laughing a little at the obviousness of my last piece of information.

"And yet," say I, looking down through the clear water at a dead tree-bough lying at the bottom, and sighing, "he is going to dine out to-night—to dine with Mrs. Huntley."

"With Mrs. Huntley! when?" with a long-drawn whistle of intelligence.

"Tell me," cry I, impulsively, raising myself from my reclining pose, and sitting upright, "you will understand better than I do—perhaps it is my mistake—but, if you had seen a person only *once* for five or ten minutes, would you sign yourself 'Yours very sincerely' to them?"

He laughs dryly.

"Not unless I was writing *after dinner*—why?"

"Nothing—no reason!"

Again he laughs.

"I think I can guess."

"Her name is Zéphine," say I again, leaning over the boat-side and pulling my forefinger slowly to and fro through the warm brown water.

"I am well aware of that fact" (smiling).

How near the swans are drawing toward us! One, with his neck well thrown back, and his wings raised and ruffled, sailing along like a lovely snow-white ship; another, with less grace and more homeliness, standing on

his head, with black webs paddling out behind.

"You were quite wrong on Sunday — *quite*," say I, speaking with sudden abruptness, and reddening.

"On Sunday!" (throwing his luminous dark eyes upward to the light clouds and faint blue of the August sky above us, as if to aid his recollection), "nothing more likely—but what about?"

"About—Roger," I answer, speaking with some difficulty ("and Mrs. Huntley," I was going to add, but some superstition hinders me from coupling their names even in a sentence).

"I dare say"—carelessly—"but what new light have you had thrown upon the matter?"

"I asked her," I say, looking him full in the face, with simple directness.

"*Asked her!*" repeats he, with an accent of profound astonishment. "Asked the woman whether she had been engaged to him, and jilted him? Impossible!"

"No! no!" cry I, with tremulous impatience, "of course not; but I asked her whether she used not to know him in India, and she said, 'Yes, we met several times,' just like *that*—she no more blushed and looked confused than *I* should if any one asked me whether I knew you!"

He is still leaning over the punt, and has begun to dabble as I did.

"You certainly have a way of putting things very strongly," he says in a rather low voice, "*convincingly* so!"

"She did not even know what part of the world he was in!" I cry, triumphantly.

"Did she say so?" (lifting up his face, and speaking quickly).

"Well, no—o—" I answer, reluctantly; "but I said, 'He is in the West Indies,' and she answered 'Yes,' or 'Indeed,' or 'Is he?' I forget which, but at any rate it implied that it was news to her."

A pike leaps not far from us, and splashes back again. I watch to see whether the widening faint circles will have strength to reach us, or whether the water's smile will be smoothed and straightened before it gets to us.

"Did Mrs. Huntley happen to say" (leaning lazily back, and speaking carelessly), "how she liked her house?"

"No; why?"

"She has only just got into it," he answers, slightly; "only about a fortnight, that is."

"I wonder," say I, ruminatingly, "what brought her to this part of the world, for she does not seem to know anybody?"

He does not answer.

"We *ought* to be friends, ought not we?" say I, beginning to laugh nervously, and looking appealingly toward him, "both of us coming to sojourn in a strange land! It is a curious coincidence our both settling here in such similar circumstances, at almost the same time, is not it?"

Still he is silent.

"*Is not it?*" cry I, irritably, raising my voice.

Again he has thrown his head back, and is perusing the sky, his hands clasped round one lifted knee.

"What *is* a coincidence?" he says, languidly. "I do not think I quite know—I am never good at long words—two things that happen accidentally at the same time, is not it?"

He lays the faintest possible stress on the word accidentally.

"And you mean to say that this is not accidental?" I cry, quickly.

"I mean nothing; I only ask for information."

How still the world is to-day! The feathery water-weeds sway, indeed, to and fro, with the motion of the water, but the tall cats'-tails, and all the flags, stand absolutely motionless, I feel vaguely ruffled, and take up my forgotten book. Holding it so as to hide my companion's face from me, I begin to read ostentatiously. He seems content to be silent; lying on the flat of his back, at the bottom of the punt, staring at the sky, and declining the overtures, and parrying the attacks, of Vick, who, having taken advantage of his supine position to mount upon his chest, now stands there wagging her tail, and wasting herself in efforts, mostly futile, but occasionally successful, to lick the end of his nose. A period of quiet elapses, during which, for the sake of appearances, I turn over a page. By-and-by, he speaks.

"Algy is your eldest brother, is not he?—Get away, you little beast!"—(the latter

clause, in a tone of sudden exasperation, is addressed, not to me, but to Vick, and tells me that my pet dog's endeavors have been crowned with a tardy prosperity).

"Yes" (still reading sedulously).

"I thought so," with a slight accent of satisfaction.

"Why?" cry I, again letting fall my volume, and yielding to a curiosity as irresistible as unwise; for he had meant me to ask, and would have been disobliged if I had not.

"We all have our hobbies, don't you know?" he says, shifting his eyes from the sky, and fixing them on the less serene, less amiable object of my face—"some people's is old china—some Elzevir editions—*I* have a mania for *clocks*—I have one in every room in my house—by-the-by, you have never been over my house—Mrs. Huntley's—she is a dear little woman, but she has her fancies, like the rest of us, and hers is—*eldest sons!*"

"But she is married!" exclaim I, stupidly. "What good can they do her, now?"—then, reddening a little at my own simplicity, I go on, hurriedly: "But he is such a boy!—younger than *you*—young enough to be her *son*—it *can* be only out of good-nature that she takes notice of him."

"Yes—true—out of good-nature!" he echoes, nodding, smiling, and speaking with that surface-assent which conveys to the hearer no impression less than acquiescence.

"Boys are not much in her way, either," he pursues, carelessly; "generally she prefers such as are of *riper* years—*much* riper!"

"How spiteful you are!" I say, glad to give my chafed soul vent in words, and looking at him with that full, cold directness which one can employ only toward such as are absolutely indifferent to one. "How she *must* have snubbed you!"

For an instant, he hesitates; then—

"Yes," he says, smiling still, though his face has whitened, and a wrathy red light has come into his deep eyes; "in the pre-Huntley era, I laid my heart at her feet—by-the-way, I must have been in petticoats at the time—and she kicked it away, as she had no doubt done—*others*."

The camel's backbone is broken. This last innuendo—in weight a straw—has done it. I speak never a word; but I rise up hastily, and, letting my novel fall heavily prone on the pit of its stomach at the punt-bottom, I take a flying leap to shore—*toward* shore, I should rather say—for I am never a good jumper—Tou Tou's lean spider-legs can always outstride me—and now I fall an inch or two short, and draw one leg out booted with river-mud. But I pay no heed. I hurry on, pushing through the brambles, and leaving a piece of my gown on each. Before I have gone five yards—his length of limb and freedom from petticoats giving him the advantage over me—he overtakes me.

"What *has* happened? at this rate you will not have much gown left by the time you reach the house."

To my excited ears, there seems to be a suspicion of laughter in his voice. I disdain to answer. The path we are pursuing is not the regular one; it is a short cut through the wood. At its widest it is very narrow; and, a little ahead of us, a bramble has thrown a strong arm right across it, making a thorny arch, and forbidding passage. By a quick movement, Mr. Musgrave gets in advance of me, and, turning round, faces me at this defile.

"What *has* happened?"

Still I remain stubbornly silent.

"We are not going to fight, at this time of day, such old friends as we are?"

The red-anger light has died out of his eyes. They look softer, and yet less languid, than I have ever seen them before; and there is subdued appeal and entreaty in his lowered voice. At the present moment, I distinctly dislike him. I think him altogether trying and odious, and I should be glad—yes, *glad*, if Vick were to bite a piece out of his leg; but, at the same time, I cannot deny that I have seldom seen any thing comelier than the young man who now stands before me, with the green woodland lights flickering about the close-shorn beauty of his face—he is well aware that his are not features that need *planting out*—while a lively emotion quickens all his lazy being.

"We are *not* old friends! Let me pass!"

"*New* friends, then—*friends*, at all events!" coming a step nearer, and speaking without a trace of sneer, sloth, or languor.

"Not friends at all! Let me pass!"

"Not until you tell me my offense—not until you own that we are friends!" (in a

tone of quick excitement, and almost of authority, that, in him, is new to me).

"Then we shall stay here all night!" reply I, with a fine obstinacy, plumping down, as I speak, on the wayside grass, among the St. John's-worts, and the red arum-berries. In a moment he has stepped aside, and is holding the stout purple bramble-stem out of my way.

"Pass, then!" he says, in a tone of impatience, frowning a little; "as you have said it, of course you will stick to it—right or wrong—or you would not be a woman; but, whether you confess it or not, we *are* friends!"

"We are NOT!" cry I, resolute to have the last word, as I spring up and fly past him, with more speed than dignity, lest he should change his mind, and again detain me.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE swallows are gone: the summer is done: it is October. The year knows that I am in a hurry, and is hasting with its shortened days—each day marked by the loss of something fair—toward the glad Christmas-time—Christmas that will bring me back my Roger—that will set him again at the foot of his table—that will give me again the sound of his foot on the stairs, the smile in his fond gray eyes. So I thought yesterday, and to-day I have heard from him; heard that, though he is greatly loath to tell me so, yet he cannot be back by Christmas; that I must hear the joy-bells ring, and see the merry Christmas cheer *alone*. It is true that he earnestly and insistently begs of me to gather all my people, father, mother, boys, girls, around me. But, after all, what are father, mother, boys, girls, to me? Father never *was* any thing, I will do myself that justice, but at this moment of sore disappointment as I lean my forehead on the letter outspread on the table before me, and dim its sentences with tears, I *belittle* even the boys. No doubt that by-and-by I shall derive a little solace from the thought of their company; that when they come I shall even be inveigled into some sort of hilarity with them; but, at present, "No."

There are some days on which all ills gather together as at a meeting. This is one. Barbara is prostrated by a violent headache, and is in such thorough physical pain, that even she cannot sympathize with me. Mr. Musgrave never makes his now daily appearance—he comes, as I jubilantly notice, as regularly as the postman—until late in the afternoon. All day, therefore, I must refrain myself, and be silent. And I am never one for brooding with private dumbness over my woes. I much prefer to air them by expression and complaint. About noon it strikes me that, *faute de mieux*, I will go and see Mrs. Huntley, tell her *suddenly* that Roger is not coming back, and see if she looks vexed, or confused, or grieved. Accordingly, soon after luncheon, I set off in the pony-carriage. It is a quiet, sultry-looking, unclouded day. One uniform livery of mist clothes sky and earth, dimming the glories of the dying leaves, and making them look dull and sodden. Every thing has a drenched air; each crimson bramble-leaf is clothed in rain-drops, and yet it is not raining. The air is thick and heavy, and one swallows it like something solid, but it is not raining: in fact, it is an English fine day.

Under the delusive idea that it is warm, or, at least, not cold, I have protected my face with no veil, my hands with no mittens; so that, long before I reach the shelter of the Portugal-laurels, that warmly hem in and border Mrs. Huntley's little graveled sweep, the end of my nose feels like an icy promontory at a great distance from me, and my hands do not feel at all. Mrs. Huntley *is* at home. Wise woman! I knew that she would be. I suppose that I follow on the footsteps of the butler more quickly than is usual, for, as the door opens, and before I can get a view of the inmate or inmates, I hear a hurried noise of scrambling, as of some one suddenly jumping up. For a little, airy woman, who looks as if one could blow her away—puff!—like a morsel of thistle-down, or a snowball, what a heavy foot Mrs. Huntley has! The next moment, I am disabused. Mrs. Huntley has clearly not moved. It was not *she* that scrambled. She is lying back in a deep arm-chair, her silky head gently denting the flowered cushion, the points of two pretty shoes slightly advanced toward the fire, and a large feather fan leisurely waving to and fro, in one white hand. Be-

yond the *fan*-movement, she is not *doing* any thing that I can detect.

"How do you do?" say I, bustling in, in a hurry to reach the fire. "How comfortable you look! how cold it is!—Algy!!" For the enigma of the noise is solved. It was Algy who shuffled and scuffled—yes, scuffled up from the low stool which he has evidently been sharing with the pretty shoes—at Mrs. Huntley's feet, on to his long legs, on which he is now standing, not at all at ease. He does not answer.

"ALGY!!" repeat I, in a tone of the profoundest, accentedest surprise, involuntarily turning my back upon my hostess, and facing my brother.

"Well, what about me?" he cries, tartly, irritated (and no wonder) by my open mouth and tragical air.

"What *has* brought you here?" I ask, slowly, and with a tactless emphasis.

"The fly from the White Hart," he answers, trying to laugh, but looking confused and angry.

"But I mean—I thought you told me, when I asked you to Tempest this week, that you could not get away for an *hour!*"

"No more I could," he answers, impatiently, yet stammering; "quite unexpected—did not know when I wrote—have to be back to-night."

"Will not you come nearer the fire?" says Mrs. Huntley, in her slow, sugared tones, with a well-bred ignoring of our squabble. "I am sure that you must be perished with cold."

I recollect myself, and comply. As I sit down, I catch a glimpse of myself in the glass. It is, indeed, difficult to abstain from the sight of one's self, however little fond one may be of it, so thickly is the room set round with rose-draped mirrors. For the moment, O friends, I will own to you, that I appear to myself nothing less than *brutally* ugly. I know that I am not so in reality, that the disfigurement is only temporary, but none the less does the consciousness deeply, deeply depress me. My nose is of a lively scarlet, which the warmth of the room is quickly deepening into a lowering purple. My quick passage through the air has set my hat a little awry, giving me a falsely rakish air, and the wind has loosened my hair—not into a picturesque and comely disorder, but into mere untidiness. And, meanwhile, how admirably small and cool *her* nose looks! What rest and composure in her whole pose! What a neat refinement in the disposition of her hair! What a soft luxury in her dress! Even my one indisputable advantage of *youth* seems to me as dirt. Looking at the completeness of her native grace, I *despise* youth. I think it an ill and ugly thing in its green unripeness. I look round the room. After the thick, outside air, saturated with moisture, I think that the warm atmosphere would, were my spirit less disquieted, lull me quickly to sleep. How perfumed it is, not with any meretricious, artificial scents, but with the clean and honest smell of sweet, live flowers. Yes, though I am aware that Mrs. Huntley has no conservatory, yet hot-house flowers and airy ferns are scattered about the room in far greater profusion than in mine, with all Roger's imposing range of glass—scattered about, here, there, and everywhere; not as if they were a rare and holiday treat, but a most common, every-day occurrence. There is not much work to be seen about, and *not a book!* On the other hand, lounging-chairs, suited to the length or shortness of *any* back; rococo photograph-stands, framing either a great many men, or a few men in a great many attitudes; soothing pictures—*décolleté* Venuses, Love's *grené* heads—tied up with rose-ribbon, and a sleepy half-light. On a small table at the owner's elbow, a blue-velvet jeweler's case stands open. On its white-satin lining my long-sighted eyes enable me to decipher the name of Hunt and Roskell; and it does not need any long-sight to observe the solid breadth of the gold band bracelet, set with large, dull turquoises, and little points of brilliant light, which is its occupant. As I note this phenomenon, my heart burns within me—yea, burns even more hotly than my nose. For father keeps Algy very tight, and I know that he has only three hundred pounds a year, besides his pay.

"I have had such bad news to-day," I say, suddenly, looking my *vis-à-vis* full and directly in the face.

"Yes?"

So far she certainly shows no signs of emotion. Her fan is still waving with slow steadiness. I see the diamonds on her hands (whence did *they* owe their rise, I wonder?) glint in the fire-light.

"Roger is not coming back!"

"Not at all?" with a slight raising of the eyebrows.

"Not before Christmas, certainly."

"Really! how disappointing! I am very sorry!"

There is not a particle of sorrow in face or tone: only the counterfeit grief of an utterly indifferent acquaintance. My heart feels a little lightened.

"And have *you* no better luck, either?" I say, more cheerfully. "Is there no talk of your—of Mr. Huntley coming back?"

Her eyelids droop: her breast heaves in a placid sigh.

"Not the slightest, I am afraid."

What to say next? I have had enough of asking after her child. I will not fall into *that* error again. Ask who all the men in the rococo frames are?—which of them, or whether any, is *Mr.* Huntley! On consideration, I decide not to do this either; and, after one or two more stunted attempts at talk, I take my leave. I ask Algy to accompany me just down the drive, and with a most grudging and sulky air of unwillingness he complies. Alas! he always used to like to be with us girls. The ponies are fresh, and we have almost reached the gate before I speak, with a difficult hesitation.

"Algy," say I, "did you happen to notice that—that *bracelet?*"

He does not answer. He is looking the other way, and turns only the back of his head toward me.

"It was from Hunt and Roskell," I say.

"Oh!"

"It must have—must have—*come to* a good deal," I go on, timidly.

He has turned his face to me now. I cannot complain, but indeed, as it now is, I prefer the back of his head, so white and headstrong does he look.

"I wish to God," he says, in a voice of low anger, "that you would be so obliging as to mind your own business, and allow me to mind mine!"

"But it *is* mine!" I cry, passionately; "what right has she to be sitting all day with young men on stools at her feet?—she, a married woman, with her husband—"

"This comes extremely well from *you*," he says, in a voice of concentrated anger, with a bitterly-sneering tone; "*how is Musgrave?*"

Before I can answer, he has jumped out, and is half-way back to the house. But indeed I am dumb. Is it possible that *he* makes such a mistake?—that he does not see the difference?

For the next half-mile, I see neither ponies, nor misty hedges, nor wintry high-road, for tears. I *used* to get on so well with the boys!

CHAPTER XXVII.

When I return home, I find that Barbara is still no better. She is still lying in her darkened room, and has asked not to be disturbed. And even *my* wrongs are not such as to justify my forcing myself upon the painful privacy of a sick-headache. How much the better am I then than I was before my late expedition? I have brought home my old grievance quite whole and unlightened by communication, and I have got a new and fresh one in addition, with absolutely no one to whom to impart it; for, even when Frank comes, I will certainly not tell *him*. I am too restless to remain in-doors over the fire, though thoroughly chilled by my late drive, and resolve to try and restore my circulation by a brisk walk in the park.

The afternoon is still young, and the day is mending. A wind has risen, and has pulled aside the steel-colored cloud-curtain, and let heaven's eyes—blue, though faint and watery—look through. And there comes another strong puff of autumnal wind, and lo! the sun, and the leaves float down in a sudden shower of amber in his light. I march along quickly and gravely through the long drooped grass—no longer sweet and fresh and upright, in its green summer coat—through the frost-seared pomp of the bronze bracken, till I reach a little knoll, whose head is crowned by twelve great brother beeches. From time immemorial they have been called the Twelve Apostles, and under one apostle I now stand, with my back against his smooth and stalwart trunk.

How *beaming* is death to them! Into what a glorious crimson they decline! My eyes travel from one tree-group to another,

and idly consider the many-colored majesty of their decay. Over all the landscape there is a look of plaintive uncontent. The distant town, with its two church-spires, is choked and effaced in mist: the very sun is sickly and irresolute. All Nature seems to say, "Have pity upon me—I die!"

It is not often that our mother is in sympathy with her children. Mostly when we cry she broadly laughs; when we laugh and are merry she weeps; but to-day my mood and hers match. The tears are as near my eyes as hers—as near hers as mine.

"'See the leaves around us falling!'"

say I, aloud, stretching out my right arm in dismal recitation. We had the hymn last Sunday, which is what has put it into my head:

"'See the leaves around us falling,
Dry and withered to the ground—.'"

Another voice breaks in:

"'Thus to thoughtless mortals calling—.'"

"How you made me jump!" cry I, descending with an irritated leap to prose, and at least making the leaves say something entirely different from what they had ever been known to say before.

"Why did not you bring your sentinel, Vick?"

He—it is Musgrave, of course—has joined me, and is leaning his flat back also against the apostle, and, like me, is looking at the mist, at the red and yellow leaves—at the whole low-spirited panorama.

"She is ill," say I, lamentably, drawing a portrait in lamp-black and Indian-ink of the whole family; "we are *all* ill—Barbara is ill!"

"Poor Barbara!"

"She has got a headache."

"Poor Barbara!"

"And I have got a heartache," say I, more for the sake of preserving the harmony of my sketch, and for making a pendant to Barbara, than because the phrase accurately describes my state.

"Poor *you!*"

"*Poor me, indeed!*" cry I, with emphasis, and to this day I cannot make up my mind whether the ejaculation were good grammar or no.

"I have had *such* bad news," I continue, feeling, as usual, a sensible relief from the communication of my grief. "Roger is not coming back!"

"*Not at all?*"

The words are the same as those employed by Mrs. Huntley; but there is much more alacrity and liveliness in the tone.

"*Not at all!*" repeat I, scornfully, looking impatiently at him; "that is so likely, is not it?"—then, "No, not *at all*"—I continue, ironically, "he has run off with some one else—some one *black!*" (with a timely reminiscence of Bobby's happy flight of imagination).

"Not till *when*, then?"

"Not till after Christmas," reply I, sighing loudly, "which is almost as bad as not at all."

"I knew *that!*" he says, rather petulantly; "you told me *that* before!"

"*I told you that before?*" cry I, opening my eyes, and raising my voice; 'why, how could I? I only heard it myself this morning!"

"It was not you, then," he says, composedly; "it must have been some one else!"

"It *could* have been no one else," retort I, hastily. "I have told no one—no one at least from whom *you* could have heard it."

"All the same, I *did* hear it" (with a quiet persistence); "now, who could it have been?" throwing back his head, elevating his chin, and lifting his eyes in meditation to the great depths of burning red in the beech's heart, above him—"ah!'—(overtaking the recollection)—"I know!"

"Who?" say I, eagerly, "not that it *could* have been any one."

"It was Mrs. Huntley!" he answers, with an air of matter-of-fact indifference.

I laugh with insulting triumph. "Well, that *is* a bad hit! What a pity that you did not fix upon some one else! I have once or twice suspected you of drawing the long bow—*now* I am sure of it! As it happens, I have just come from Mrs. Huntley, and she knew no more about it than the babe unborn!"

I am looking him full in the face, but, to my surprise, I cannot detect the expression of confusion and defeat which I anticipate. There is only the old white-anger look that I have such a happy knack of calling up on his features.

"I *am* a consummate liar!" he says, quietly, though his eyes flash. "Every one knows *that;* but, all the same, she *did* tell me."

"I do not believe a word of it!" cry I, in a fury.

He makes no answer, but, lifting his hat, begins to walk quickly away. For a hundred yards I allow him to go unrecalled; then, as I note his quickly-diminishing figure and the heavy mists beginning to fold him, my resolution fails me; I take to my heels and scamper after him.

"Stop," say I, panting as I come up with him, "I dare say—perhaps—you *thought* you were speaking truth!—there must, must be some *mistake!*"

He does not answer, but still walks quickly on.

"Tell me," cry I, posting on alongside of him, breathless and distressed—"when was it? where did you hear it? how long ago?"

"I never heard it!"

"Yes, you did," cry I, passionately, asseverating what I have so lately and passionately denied. "You know you did; but when was it? how was it? where was it!"

"It was *nowhere*," he answers, with a cold, angry smile. "I was *drawing the long bow!*"

I stop in baffled rage and misery. I stand stock-still, with the long, dying grass wetly and limply clasping my ankles. To my surprise he stops too.

"I wish you were *dead!*" I say tersely, and it is not a figure of speech. For the moment I do honestly wish it.

"Do you?" he answers, throwing me back a look of hardly inferior animosity; "I dare say I do not much mind." A little pause, during which we eye each other, like two fighting-cocks. "Even if I *were* dead," he says, in a low voice—"mind, I do not blame you for wishing it—sometimes I wish it myself—but even if I *were*, I do not see how that would hinder Sir Roger and Mrs. Huntley from corresponding."

"They *do not* correspond," cry I, violently; "it is a falsehood!" Then, with a quick change of thought and tone: "But if they do, I—I do not mind. I—I—am very glad—if Roger likes it! There is no harm in it."

"Not the slightest."

"Do you *always* stay at home?" cry I, in a fury, goaded out of all politeness and reserve by the surface false acquiescence of his tone; "do you *never* go away? I *wish* you would! I wish"—(speaking between laughing and crying)—"that you could take your abbey up on your back, as a snail does its shell, and march off with it into another county."

"But unfortunately I cannot."

"What have I done to you?" cry I, falling from anger to reproach, "that you take such delight in hurting me? You can be pleasant enough to—to other people. I never hear you hinting and sneering away any one else's peace of mind; but as for me, I never—*never* am alone with you that you do not leave me with a pain—a tedious, long ache *here*"—passionately clasping my hands upon my heart).

"Do not I?"—(Then half turning away in a lowered voice)—"*nor you me!*"

"*I!*" repeat I, positively laughing in my scorn of this accusation. "*I* hint! *I* imply! why I *could* not do it, if I were to be shot for it! it is not *in* me!"

He does not immediately answer; still, he is looking aside, and his color changes.

"Ask mother, ask the boys, ask Barbara," cry I, in great excitement, "whether I ever *could* wrap up any thing neatly, if I wished it ever so much? Always, *always* I have to blurt it out! *I* hint!"

"Hint! no!" he repeats, in a tone of vexed bitterness. "Well, no! no one can accuse you of *hinting!* Yours is honest, open cut and thrust!"

"If it is," retort I, bluntly, still speaking with a good deal of heat, "it is your own fault! I have no wish to quarrel, being such near neighbors, and—and—altogether—of course I had rather be on good terms than bad ones! When you *let* me—when you leave me alone—I *almost*—sometimes I *quite* like you. I am speaking seriously! I *do*."

"You do not say so?" again turning his head aside, and speaking with the objectionable intonation of irony.

"At home," pursue I, still chafing under the insult to my amiability, "I never was reckoned quarrelsome—*never!* Of course I was not like Barbara—there are not many like her—but I did very well. Ask *any one*

of them—it does not matter which—they will all tell you the same—whether I did not!"

"You were a household angel, in fact?"

"I was nothing of the kind," cry I, very angry, and yet laughing: the laughter caused by the antagonism of the epithet with the many recollected blows and honest sounding cuffs that I have, on and off, exchanged with Bobby.

A pause.

The sun has quite gone now: sulky and feeble, he has shrunk to his cold bed in the west, and the victor-mist creeps, crawls, and soaks on unopposed.

"Good-night!" cry I, suddenly, "I am going!" and I am as good as my word.

With the triple agility of health, youth, and indignation, I scurry away through the melancholy grass, and the heaped and fallen leaves, home.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DING-DONG bell! ding-dong bell! The Christmas bells are ringing. Christmas has come—Christmas as it appears on a Christmas card—white and hard, and beset with puffed-out, ruffled robins. Only Nature is wise enough not to express the ironical wish that we may have a "merry one."

For myself, I have but small opinion of Christmas as a time of jollity, Solemn—*blessed*, if you will—but no, not jovial. At no time do the dead so clamor to be remembered. Even those that went a long time ago, the regret for whose departure has settled down to a tender, almost pleasant pain; whom at other times we go nigh to forget; even they cry out loud, "Think of us!"

When all the family is gathered, when the fire burns quick and clear, and the church-bells ring out grave and sweet, neither will *they* be left out. But, on the other hand, to one who has paid his bills, and in whose family Death's cannon have as yet made no breaches, I do not see why it may not be a season of moderate, placid content.

Festivity! jollity! *never!* I have paid my bills, and there are no gaps among my people. Sometimes I tremble when I think how many we are; one of us must go soon. But, as yet, when I count us over, none lacks. Father, mother, Algy, Bobby, the Brat, Tou Tou. Slightly as I have spoken of them to myself, and conscientiously as I have promised myself to derive no pleasure from their society, and even to treat them with distant coolness, if they are, any of them, and Bobby especially—it is he that I most mistrust—more joyfully disposed than I think fitting, yet my heart has been growing ever warmer and warmer at the thought of them, as Christmas-time draws nigh; and now, as I kiss their firm, cold, healthy cheeks—(I declare that Bobby's cheeks are as hard as marbles), I know how I have lied to myself.

Father is not in quite so good a humor as I could have wished, his man having lost his hat-box *en route*, and consequently his nose is rather more aquiline than I think desirable.

"Do not be alarmed!" says Bobby, in a patronizing aside, introducing me, as if I were a stranger, to father's peculiarities; "a little infirmity of temper, but the *heart* is in the right place."

"Bobby," say I, anxiously, in a whisper, "has he—has he brought the *bag?*"

Bobby shakes his head.

"I *knew* he would not," cry I, rather crest-fallen. Then, with sudden exasperation: "I wish I had not given it to him; he always *hated* it. I wish I had given it to Roger instead."

"Never you mind!" cries Bobby, while his round eyes twinkle mischievously; "I dare say he has got one by now, a nice one, all beads and wampums, that the old Begum has made him."

I laugh, but I also sigh. What a long time it seems since I was jealous of Bobby's Begum! We are a little behind father, whispering with our heads together, while he, in his raspingest voice, is giving his delinquent a month's warning. That tone! it still makes me feel sneaky.

"Bobby," say I, putting my arm through his substantial one, and speaking in a low tone of misgiving, "how is he? how has he been?"

"We have been a little fractious," replies Bobby, leniently—"a little disposed to quarrel with our bread-and-butter; but, as you may remember, my dear, from *your* experience of our humble roof, Christmas never was our happiest time."

"No, never," reply I, pensively.

The storm is rising: at least father's voice is. It appears that the valet is not only to go, but to go without a character.

"Never you mind," repeats Bobby, reassuringly, seeing me blench a little at these disused amenities, pressing the hand that rests on his arm against his stout side; "it is nothing to *you!* bless your heart, you are the apple of his eye."

"Am I?" reply I, laughing. "It has newly come to me, if I am."

"And I am his 'good, brave Bobby!'—his 'gallant boy!'—do you know why?"

"No."

"Because I am going to Hong-Kong, and he hears that they are keeping two nice, roomy graves open all the time there!"

"You are *not?*" (in a tone of keen anxiety and pain); then, with a sudden change of tone to a nervous and constrained amenity: "Yes, it *is* a nice-sized room, is not it? My only fault with it is, that the windows are so high up that one cannot see out of them when one is sitting down."

For father, having demolished his body-servant, and reduced mother to her usual niche-state, now turns to me, and in his genialest, happiest society manner, compliments me on my big house.

That is a whole day ago. Since then, I have grown used to seeing father's austere face, unbent into difficult suavity, at the opposite end of the dinner-table to me, to hearing the well-known old sound of Tou Tou's shrieks of mixed anguish and delight, as Bobby rushes after her in headlong pursuit, down the late so silent passages; and to looking complacently from one to another of the holiday faces round the table, where Barbara and I have sat, during the last noiseless month, in stillest dialogue or preoccupied silence.

I *love* noise. You may think that I have odd taste; but I *love* Bobby's stentor laugh, and Tou Tou's ear-piercing yells. I even forget to think whether their mirth passes the appointed bounds I had set it. I have mislaid my receipt of cold repression. My heart goes out to them.

I have been a little disturbed as to how to dispose of father during the day, but he mercifully takes that trouble off my hands. Providence has brought good out of evil, congenial occupation out of the hat-box. He has spent all the few daylight hours in telegraphing for it to every station on the line; in telling several home-truths to the porters at our own station, which—it being Christmas-time, and they consequently all more or less tipsy—they have taken with a bland playfulness that he has found a little trying; and, lastly, in writing a long letter to the *Times*. And I, meanwhile, being easy in my mind on his score, knowing that he is happy, am at leisure to be happy myself. In company with my brother, I have spent all the little day in decorating the church, making it into a cheerful, green Christmas bower. We always did it at home.

The dusk has come now—the quick-hurrying, December dusk, and we have all but finished. We have had to beg for a few candles, in order to put our finishing touches here and there about the sombre church. The flame, throwing little jets of light on the glossy laurel-leaves that make collars round the pillars' stout necks; on the fresh moss-beds, vividly green, in the windows; on the dull, round holly-berries. In the glow, the ivy twines in cunning garlands round the rough-sculptured font, and the oak lectern, and, above God's altar, a great white cross of hot-house flowers blooms delicately, telling of summer, and matching the words of old good news beneath it, that brought, as some say, summer, or, at least, the hope of summer, to the world.

Yes, we have nearly done. The Brat stands on the top of a step-ladder, dexterously posing the last wintry garland; and all we others are resting a moment—we and our co-adjutors. For we have *two* coadjutors. Mr. Musgrave, of course. Now, at this moment, through the gray light, and across the candles, I can see him leaning against the font, while Barbara kneels with bent head at his feet, completing the ornamentation of the pedestal. I always knew that things would come right if we waited long enough, and *coming* right they are—*coming*, not *come*, for still he has not spoken. I have consulted each and all of my family, father excepted, as to the average length of time allotted to *unspoken* courtship, and each has assigned a different period; the *longest*, however, has been already far exceeded by Frank. Tou Tou, indeed, adduces a

gloomy case of a young, man, who spent two years and a half in dumb longing, and broke a blood-vessel and died at the end of them; but this is so discouraging an anecdote, that we all pooh-pooh it as unauthentic.

"Perhaps he does not mean to speak at all!" says the Brat, starting a new and hazardous idea; "perhaps he means to take it for granted!"

"Walk out with her, some fine morning," says Algy, laughing, "and say, like Wemmick, 'Hallo! here's a church! let's have a wedding!'"

"It would be a very good thing," retorts the Brat, gravely, "if there were a printed form for such occasions; it would be a great relief to people."

This talk did not happen in the church, but at an evening *séance* overnight. Our second coadjutor is Mrs. Huntley.

"I am afraid I am not very efficient," she says, with a pathetic smile. "I can't *stand* very long, but, if I might be allowed to sit down now and then, I might perhaps be some little help."

And sat down she has, accordingly, ever since, on the top pulpit-step. It seems that Algy cannot stand very long, either; for he has taken possession of the step next below the top one, and there he abides. Thank Heaven! they are getting dark now! If *legitimate* lovers, whose cooing is desirable and approved, are a sickly and sickening spectacle, surely the sight of illegitimate lovers would make the blood boil in the veins of Moses, Miriam, or Job.

Bobby, Tou Tou, and I, having no one to hang over us, or gawk amorously up at us, are sitting in a row in our pew. Bobby has garlanded Tou Tou preposterously with laurel, to give us an idea, as he says, of how he himself will look by-and-by, after some future Trafalgar. Now, he is whispering to me—a whisper accompanied by one of those powerful and painful nudges, with which he emphasizes his conversation on his listener's ribs.

"Look at him!" indicating his elder brother, and speaking with a tone of disgust and disparagement; "did you ever see such a *beast* as he looks?"

"Not often!" reply I, readily, with that fine intolerance which one never sees in full bloom after youth is past.

"I say, Nancy!" with a second and rather lesser nudge, "if ever you see any symptoms of—of *that*—" (nodding toward the pulpit) "in me—"

"If—" repeat I, scornfully, "of course I shall!"

"Well, that is as may be, but if you *do*, mind what I tell you—do not say any thing to anybody, but—*put an end to me!* it does not matter *how;* smother me with bolsters; run your bodkin up to its hilt in me—"

"Even if I *did*," interrupt I, laughing, "I should never reach any vital part—you are *much* too fat!"

"I should not be so fat then," returns he, gravely, amiably overlooking the personality of my observation; "love would have pulled me down!"

The Brat has nearly finished. He is nimbly descending the ladder, with a long guttering dip in his right hand.

"The other two—" begins Bobby, thoughtfully, turning his eyes from pulpit to font.

"I do not mind *them* half so much," interrupt I, indulgently; "they are not half so disgusting."

"Has he done it yet?" (lowering his cheerful loud voice to an important whisper).

I shake my head.

"Not unless he has done it since luncheon! he had not *then;* I asked her."

"I am beginning to think that *your* old man's plan was the best, after all," continues Bobby, affably. "I thought him rather out of date, at the time, for applying to your parents, but, after all, it saved a great deal of trouble, and spared us a world of suspense."

I am silent; swelling with a dumb indignation at the epithet bestowed on my Roger; but unable to express it outwardly, as I well know that, if I do, I shall be triumphantly quoted against myself.

"Who will break it to Toothless Jack?" says Bobby, presently, with a laugh; "after all the expense he has been at, too, with those teeth! it is not as if it were a beggarly two or three, but a whole complete new set—thirty-two individual grinders!"

"Such beauties too!" puts in Tou Tou, cackling.

"It is a thousand pities that they should be allowed to go out of the family," says Bobby, warmly.—"Tou Tou, my child—" (putting his

arm round her shoulders)—"a bright vista opens before you!—your charms are approaching maturity!—with a little encouragement he might be induced to lay his teeth—two-and-thirty, mind—at your feet!"

Tou Tou giggles, and asserts that she will "kick them away, if he does." Bobby mildly but firmly remonstrates, and points out to her the impropriety and ingratitude of such a line of conduct. But his arguments, though acute and well put, are not convincing, and the subject is continued, with ever-increasing warmth, all the way home.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It is Christmas-day—a clean white Christmas, pure and crisp. Wherever one looks, one's eyes water cruelly. For my part, I am very thankful that it did not occur to God to make the world always white. I hate snow's blinding livery. Each tiniest twig on the dry harsh trees is overladen with snow. It is a wonder that they do not break under it; nor is there any wind to shake down and disperse it. Tempest is white; the church is white: the whole world colorless and blinding. I have been in the habit of looking upon Vick as a white dog; to-day she appears disastrously dark—dirty brunette. Soap-and-water having entirely failed to restore her complexion, Bobby kindly proposes to *pipeclay* her.

We have all been to church, and admired our own decorations. And through all the prayer and praise, and the glad Christmas singing, my soul has greatly hungered for Roger. Yes, even though all the boys are round me—Bobby on this side, the Brat on that—Algy directly in front; all behaving nicely, too; for are not they right under father's eyes? Yes, and, for the matter of that, under the rector's too, as he towers straight above us, under his ivy-bush—the ivy-bush into which Bobby was so anxious yesterday to insert some mistletoe.

Church is over now, and the short afternoon has also slipped by. We are at dinner; we are dining early to-night—at half-past six o'clock, and we are to have a dance for the servants afterward. Any hospitality to my equals I have steadily and stoutly declined, but it seems a shame to visit my own loneliness on the heads of the servants, to whom it is nothing. They have always had a Christmas-dance in Roger's reign, and so a dance they are to have now. We have religiously eaten our beef and plum-pudding, and have each made a separate little blue fire of burnt brandy in our spoon.

It is dessert now, and father has proposed Roger's health. I did not expect it, and I never was so nearly betrayed into feeling fond of father in my life. They all drink it, each wishing him something good. As for me, I have been a fool always, and I am a fool now. I can wish him nothing, my voice is choked and my eyes drowned in inappropriate tears; only, from the depths of my heart, I ask God to give him every thing that He has of choicest and best. For a moment or two, the wax-lights, the purple grapes, the gleaming glass and shining silver, the kindly, genial faces swim blurred before my vision. Then I hastily wipe away my tears, and smile back at them all. As I raise my glistening eyes, I meet those of Mr. Musgrave fixed upon me—(he is the only stranger present). His look is not one that wishes to be returned; on the contrary, it is embarrassed at being met. It is a glance that puzzles me, full of inquiring curiosity, mixed with a sort of mirth. In a second—I could not tell you why—I look hastily away.

"I wonder what he is doing *now, this very minute!*" says Tou Tou, who is dining in public for the first time, and whose conversation is checked and her deportment regulated by Bobby, who has been at some pains to sit beside her, and who guides her behavior by the help of many subtle and unseen pinches under the table; from revolting against which a fear of father hinders her, a fact of which Bobby is most basely aware.

"Had not you better telegraph?" asks Algy, with languid irony (Algy certainly is not quite so nice as he used to be). "Flapping away the blue-tailed fly, with a big red-and-yellow bandana, probably."

"Playing the banjo for a lot of little niggers to dance to!" suggests the Brat.

"They are all wrong, are not they, Nancy?" says Bobby, in a lowered voice, to me, on whose left hand he has placed himself; "he is sitting in his veranda, is not he? in a palm hat and nankeen breeches, with his arm around the old Wampoo."

"I dare say," reply I, laughing. "I hope so," for, indeed, I am growing quite fond of my dusky rival.

The ball is to be in the servants' hall; it is a large, long room, and thither, when all the guests are assembled, we repair. We think that we shall make a greater show, and inspire more admiration, if we appear in pairs. I therefore make my entry on father's arm. Never with greater trepidation have I entered any room, for I am to open the ball with the butler, and the prospect fills me with dismay. If he were a venerable family servant, a hoary-headed old seneschal, who had known Roger in petticoats, it would have been nothing. I could have chattered filially to him; but he is a youngish man, who came only six months ago. On what subjects can we converse? I feel small doubt that his own sufferings will be hardly inferior in poignancy to mine.

The room is well lit, and the candles shine genially down from the laurel garlands and icy festoons which clothe the walls. They light the faces and various dresses of a numerous assembly — every groom, footman, house-maid, and scullion, from far and near. The ladies seem largely to preponderate both in number and *aplomb;* the men appearing, for the more part, greatly disposed to run for shelter behind the bolder petticoats; particularly the stablemen. The footmen, being more accustomed to ladies' society, are less embarrassed by their own hands, and by the exigencies of chivalry. This inversion of the usual attitude of the sexes, will, no doubt, be set more than right when we have retired. The moment has arrived. I quit father's arm — for the first time in my life I am honestly sorry to drop it—and go up to my destined partner.

"Ashton," say I, with an attempt at an easy and unembarrassed smile, "will you dance this quadrille with me?"

"Thank you, my lady."

How calm he is! how self-possessed! Oh, that he would impart to me the secret of his composure! I catch sight of the Brat, who is passing at the moment.

"Brat!" cry I eagerly, snatching at his coat-sleeve, like a drowning man at a straw, "Will *you* be our *vis-à-vis?*"

"All right," replies the Brat, gayly, "but I have not got a partner yet."

Off he goes in search of one, and Ashton and I remain *tête-à-tête.* I suppose I ought to take his arm, and lead him to the top of the room. After a moment of hot hesitation, I do this. Here we are, arrived. Oh, why did I ask him so soon? Two or three minutes elapse before the Brat's return.

"How nicely you have all done the decorations!"

"I am glad you think so, my lady."

"They are better than ours at the church."

"Do you think so, my lady?"

A pause. Everybody is choosing partners. Tou Tou, grinning from ear to ear, is bidding a bashful button-boy to the merry dance. Father—do my eyes deceive me?—father himself is leading out the house-keeper. Evidently he is saying something dignifiedly humorous to her, for she is laughing. I wish that he would sometimes be dignifiedly humorous to us, or even humorous without the dignity. Barbara, true to her life-long instincts, is inviting the clergyman's shabby, gawky man-of-all-work, at whom the ladies'-maids are raising the nose of contempt. Mr. Musgrave is soliciting a kitchen-wench.

"Are there as many here as you expected?"

"Quite, my lady."

Another pause.

"I hope," with bald affability, in desperation of a topic, "that you will all enjoy yourselves!"

"Thank you, my lady!"

Praise God! here is the Brat at last! Owing, I suppose, to the slenderness and fragile tenuity of his own charms, the Brat is a great admirer of fine women, the bigger the better; quantity, not quality; and, true to his colors, he now arrives with a neighboring cook, a lady of sixteen stone, on his arm.

We take our places. While chassezing and poussetting, thank Heaven, a very little talk goes a very long way. My mind begins to grow more easy. I am even sensible of a little feeling of funny elation at the sound of the fiddles gayly squeaking. I can look about me and laugh inwardly at the distant sight of Tou Tou and the button-boy turning each other nimbly round; of father, in the fourth figure, blandly backing between Mrs. Mitchell and a cook-maid.

We have now reached the fifth. At the few balls I have hitherto frequented it has

been a harmless figure enough; hands all round, and a repetition of *l'été*. But *now*—oh, horror! what do I see? Everybody far and near is standing in attitude to gallopade. The Brat has his little arm round the cook's waist—at least not all the way round—it would take a lengthier limb than his to effect *that;* but a bit of the way, as far as it will go. An awful idea strikes me. Must Ashton and I gallopade too? I glance nervously toward him. He is looking quite as apprehensive at the thought that I shall expect him to gallopade with me, as I am at the thought that he will expect me to gallopade with him. I do not know how it is that we make our mutual alarm known to each other, only I know that, while all the world is gallopading round us, we gallopade not. Instead, we take hands, and jig distantly round each other.

The improvised valse soon ends, and I look across at the Brat. Gallant boy! the beads of perspiration stand on his young brow, but there is no look of blenching! When the time comes he will be ready to do it again.

As I stand in silent amusement watching him, having, for the moment, no dancing duties of my own, I hear a voice at my elbow, Bobby's, who, having come in later than the rest of us, has not been taking part in the dance.

"Nancy! Nancy!" in a tone of hurried excitement, "for the love of Heaven look at *father!* If you stand on tiptoe you will be able to see him; he has been *gallopading!* When I saw his venerable coat-tails flying, a feather would have knocked me down! You really ought to see it" (lowering his voice confidentially), "it might give you an idea about your own old man, and the old Wam—"

"*Hang* the old Wampoo!" cry I, with inelegant force, laughing.

The duty part of the evening is over now. We have all signalized ourselves by feats of valor. I have scampered through an unsociable country-dance with the head coachman, and have had my smart gown of faint pink and pearl color nearly torn off my back by the ponderous-footed pair that trip directly after me. We have, in fact, done our duty, and may retire as soon as we like. But the music has got into our feet, and we promise ourselves one valse among ourselves before we depart.

The Brat is the only exception. He still cleaves to his cook; dancing with her is a *tour de force*, on which he piques himself. Mrs. Huntley and Algy are already flying down the room in an active, tender embrace. I have been asked as long ago as before dinner by Mr. Musgrave. I was rather surprised and annoyed at his inviting *me* instead of Barbara; but as, with this exception, his conduct has been unequivocally demonstrative, I console myself with the notion that he looks upon me as the necessary pill to which Barbara will be the subsequent jam.

The first bars of the valse are playing when Bobby comes bustling up. Healthy jollity and open mirth are written all over his dear, fat face.

"Come along, Nancy! let us have *one* more scamper before we die!"

"I am engaged to Mr. Musgrave," reply I, with a graceless and discontented curl of lip, and raising of nose.

"All right!" says Bobby, philosophically, walking away; "I am sure I do not mind, only I had a fancy for having *one* more spin with you."

"So you shall!" cry I, impulsively, with a sharp thought of Hong-Kong, running after him, and putting his solid right arm round my waist.

Away we go in mad haste. Like most sailors, Bobby dances well. I am nothing very wonderful, but I suit *him*. In many musicless waltzings of winter evenings, down the lobby at home, we have learned to fit each other's step exactly. At our first pausing to recover breath, I become sensible of a face behind me, of a fierce voice in my ear.

"I had an idea, Lady Tempest, that this was *our* dance!"

"So it was!" reply I, cheerfully; "but you see I have cut you!"

"So I perceive!"

"Had not you better call Bobby out!" cry I, with a jeering laugh, tired of his eternal black looks. "You really are *too* silly! I wish I had a looking-glass here to show you your face!"

"Do you?" (very shortly).

Repartee is never Frank's forte. This is all that he now finds with which to wither me. However, even if he had any thing more or more pungent to say, I should not hear him, for I am beginning to dance off again.

"What a fool he is to care!" says Bobby, contemptuously; "after all, he is an ill-tempered beast! I suppose if one kicked him down-stairs it would put a stop to his marrying Barbara, would not it?"

I laugh.

"I suppose so."

It is over now. The last long-drawn-out notes have ceased to occupy the air. As far as *we* are concerned, the ball is over, for we have quitted it. We have at length removed the *gêne* of our presence from the company, and have left them to polka and schottische their fill until the morning. We have reached our own part of the house. My cheeks are burning and throbbing with the quick, unwonted exercise. My brain is unpleasantly stirred: a hundred thoughts in a second run galloping through it. I leave the others in the warm-lit drawing-room, briskly talking and discussing the scene we have quitted, and slip away through the door, into a dark and adjacent anteroom, where the fire lies at death's door, low and dull, and the candles are unlighted.

I draw the curtains, unbar the shutters, and, lifting the heavy sash, look out. A cold, still air, sharp and clear, at once greets my face with its frosty kisses. Below me, the great house-shadow projects in darkness, and beyond it lies a great and dazzling field of shining snow, asleep in the moonlight.

Snow-trees, snow-bushes, sparkle up against the dusk quiet of the sky. No movement anywhere! absolute stillness! perfect silence! It is broken now, this silence, by the church-clock with slow wakefulness chiming twelve. Those slow strokes set me a thinking. I hear no longer the loud and lively voices next door, the icy penetration of the air is unfelt by me, as I lean, with my elbow on the sill, looking out at the cold grace of the night. My mind strays gently away over all my past life—over the last important year. I think of my wedding, of my little live wreath of sweet Nancies, of our long, dusty journey, of Dresden.

With an honest, stinging heart-pang, I think of my ill-concealed and selfish weariness in our twilight walks and scented drives, of the look of hurt kindness on his face, at his inability to please me. I think of our return, of the day when he told me of the necessity of his voyage to Antigua, and of my own egotistic unwillingness to accompany him. I think of our parting, when I shed such plenteous tears—tears that seem to me now to have been so much more tears of remorse, of sorrow that I was not sorrier, than of real grief. In every scene I seem to myself to have borne a most shabby part.

My meditations are broken in upon by a quick step approaching me, by a voice in my ear—Algy's.

"You are *here*, are you? I have been looking for you everywhere! Why, the window is *open!* For Heaven's sake, let me get you a cloak! you know how delicate your chest is. For *my* sake, *do!*"

It is too dark to see his face, but there is a quick, excited tenderness in his voice.

"*My* chest delicate!" cry I, in an accent of complete astonishment. "Well, it is news to me if it is! My dear boy, what has put such an idea into your head? and if I got a cloak, I should think it would be for my *own* sake, not yours!"

He has been leaning over me in the dusk. At my words he starts violently and draws back.

"It is *you*, is it?" he says, in an altered voice of constraint, whence all the mellow tenderness has fled.

"To be sure!" reply I, matter-of-factly. "From whom did you take me?"

But though I ask, alas! I know.

CHAPTER XXX.

How are unmusical people to express themselves when they are glad? People with an ear and a voice can sing, but what is to become of those who have not? Must they whoop inarticulately? For myself, I do not know one tune from another. I am like the man who said that he knew two tunes, one was "God save the Queen," and the other was not. And yet to-day I have as good a heart for singing as ever had any of the most famous songsters. In tune, out of tune, I must lift up my voice. It is as urgent a need for me as for any mellow thrush. For my heart—oh, rare case!—is fuller of joy than it can hold. It brims over. Roger is coming back. It is February, and he has been away nearly seven months. All minor evils and anxieties—Bobby's departure for Hong-Kong, Algy's increas-

ing besotment about Mrs. Huntley, and consequent slight estrangement from me—(to me a very bitter thing)—Frank's continued silence as regards Barbara—all these are swallowed up in gladness.

When *he* is back, all will come right. Is it any wonder that they have gone wrong, while *I* only was at the helm? My good news arrived only this morning, and yet, a hundred times in the short space that has elapsed since then, I have rehearsed the manner of our meeting, have practised calling him "Roger," with familiar ease, have fixed upon my gown and the manner of my coiffure, and have wearied Barbara with solicitous queries, as to whether she thinks that I have grown perceptibly plainer in the last seven months, whether she does not think—(with honest anxiety this)—that my appearance is calculated to repel a person grown disused to it. To all which questions, she with untired gentleness gives pleasant and favorable answers.

The inability under which I labored of refraining from imparting *bad* news is tenfold increased in the case of good. I must have some one to whom to relate my prosperity. It will certainly *not* be Mrs. Huntley this time. Though I have struggled against the feeling as unjust, and disloyal to my faith in Roger, I still cannot suppress a sharp pang of distrust and jealousy, as often as I think of her, and of the relation made to me by Frank, as to her former connection with my husband. Neither am I in any hurry to tell Frank. To speak truth, I am in no good-humor with him or with his unhandsome shilly-shallying, and unaccountable postponement of what became a duty months ago.

Never mind! this also will come right when Roger returns. The delightful stir and hubbub in my soul hinder me from working or reading, or any tranquil in-door occupation; and, as afternoon draws on, fair and not cold, I decide upon a long walk. The quick exercise will perhaps moderately tire me, and subdue my fidgetiness by the evening, and nobody can hinder me from thinking of Roger all the way.

Barbara has a cold—a nasty, stuffy, choky cold; so I must do without her. Apparently I must do without Vick too. She makes a feint, indeed, of accompanying me half-way to the front gate, then sits down on her little shivering haunches, smirks, and when I call her, looks the other way, affecting not to hear. On my calling more peremptorily, "Vick! Vick!" she tucks her tail well in, and canters back to the house on three legs.

So it comes to pass that I set out quite alone. I have no definite idea where to go—I walk vaguely along, following my nose, as they say, smiling foolishly, and talking to myself—now under my breath—now out loud. A strong southwest wind blows steadily in my face: it sounded noisy and fierce enough as I sat in the house; but there is no vice or malevolence in it—it is only a soft bluster.

Alternate clouds and sunshine tenant the sky. The shadows of the tree-trunks lie black and defined across the road—branches, twigs, every thing—then comes a sweep of steely cloud, and they disappear, swallowed up in one uniform gray: a colorless moment or two passes, and the sun pushes out again; and they start forth distinct and defined, each little shoot and great limb, into new life on the bright ground. I laugh out loud, out of sheer jollity, as I watch the sun playing at hide-and-seek with them.

What a good world! What a handsome, merry, sweetly-colored world! Unsatisfying? disappointing?—not a bit of it! It must be people's own fault if they find it so.

I have walked a mile or so before I at length decide upon a goal, toward which to tend—a lone and distant cottage, tenanted by a very aged, ignorant, and feudally loyal couple—a cottage sitting by the edge of a brown common—one of the few that the greedy hand of tillage has yet spared—where geese may still stalk and hiss unreproved, and errant-tinker donkeys crop and nibble undisturbed:

> "Where the golden furze
> With its green thin spurs
> Doth catch at the maiden's gown."

It is altogether a choice and goodly walk; next to nothing of the tame high-road. The path leads through a deep, wooded dell; over purple plough-lands! down retired lanes.

After an hour and a quarter of smartish walking, I reach the door There are no signs of ravaging children about. Long, long ago—years before this generation was born—the noisy children went out; some to the church-yard; some, with clamor of wedding-bells, to separate life. I knock, and after an interval

hear the sound of pattens clacking across the flagged floor, and am admitted by an old woman, dried and pickled, by the action of the years, into an active cleanly old mummy, and whose fingers are wrinkled even more than time has done it, by the action of soapsuds. I am received with the joyful reverence due to my exalted station, am led in, and posted right in front of the little red fire and the singing kettle, and introduced to a very old man, who sits on the settle in the warm chimney-corner, dressed in an ancient smock-frock, and with both knotted hands clasped on the top of an old oak staff. He is evidently childish, and breaks now and then into an anile laugh at the thought, no doubt, of some dead old pothouse jest. A complication arises through his persisting in taking me for a sister of Roger's, who died thirty years ago, in early girlhood, and addressing me accordingly. I struggle a little for my identity, but, finding the effort useless, resign it.

"This poor ould person is quoite aimless," says his wife with dispassionate apology; "but what can you expect at noinety-one?"

(Her own years cannot be much fewer.)

I say tritely that it is a great age.

"He's very fatiguin' on toimes!—that he is!" she continues, eying him with contemplated candor—"he crumbles his wittles to that extent that I 'ave to make him sit upo' the *News of the World*."

As it seems to me that the conversation is taking a painful direction, I try to divert it by telling my news; but the bloom is again taken off it by the old man, who declines to be disabused of the idea that the Peninsular is still raging, and that it is Roger's *grandfather* who is returning from that field of glory. After a few more minutes, during which the old wife composedly tells me of all the children she has buried—she has to think twice before she can recollect the exact number—and in the same breath remarks, "How gallus bad their 'taters were last year," I take my departure, and leave the old man still nodding his weak old head, and chuckling to the kettle.

On first leaving the house, I feel dashed and sobered. The inertness and phlegmatic apathy of dry and ugly old age seem to weigh upon and press down the passionate life of my youth, but I have not crossed a couple of ploughed fields and seen the long slices newly ploughed, lying rich and thick in the sun; I have not heard two staves of the throstle's loud song, before I have recovered myself. I also begin to sing. I am not very harmonious, perhaps, I never am; and I wander now and then from the tune; but it is good enough for the stalking geese, my only audience, except a ragged jackass, who, moved by my example, lifts his nose and gives vent to a lengthy bray of infinite yearning.

I am half-way home now. I have reached the wood—Brindley Wood; henceforth I am not very likely to forget its name. The path dips at once and runs steeply down, till it reaches the bottom of the dell, along which a quick brook runs darkling. In summer, when the leaves are out, it is twilight here at high noonday. Hardly a peep of sky to be seen through the green arch of oak and elm; but now, through the net-work of winter twigs one looks up, and sees the faint, far blue, for the loss of which no leafage can compensate. Winter brownness above, but a more than summer green below—the heyday riot of the mosses. Mossed tree-trunks, leaning over the bustling stream; emerald moss carpets between the bronze dead leaves; all manner of mosses; mosses with little nightcaps; mosses like dolls' ferns; mosses like plump cushions; and upon them here and there blazes the glowing red of the small peziza-cups.

I am still singing; and, as no wind reaches this shadowed hollow, I have taken off my hat, and walk slowly along, swinging it in my hand. It is a so little-frequented place, that I give an involuntary start, and my song suddenly dies, when, on turning a corner, I come face to face with another occupant. In a moment I recover myself. It is only Frank, sitting on a great lichened stone, staring at the brook and the trees.

"You seem very cheerful!" he says, rising, stretching out his hand, and not (as I afterward recollect) expressing the slightest surprise at our unlikely rencontre. "I never heard you lift up your voice before."

"I seem what I am," reply I, shortly. "I *am* cheerful."

"You mostly are."

"That is all that *you* know about it," reply I, brusquely, rather resenting the accusation. "I have not been *at all* in good spirits all this

—this autumn and winter, not, that is, compared to what I usually am."

"Have not you?"

"I *am* in good spirits to-day, I grant you," continue I, more affably; "it would be very odd if I were not. I should jump out of my skin if I were quite sure of getting back into it again; I have had *such* good news."

"Have you? I wish *I* had" (sighing). "What is it?"

"I will give you three guesses," say I, trying to keep grave, but breaking out everywhere, as I feel, into badly-suppressed smiles.

"Something about the boys, of course!"—(half fretfully)—"it is always the boys."

"It is nothing about the boys—quite wrong. That is *one*."

"The fair Zéphine is no more!—by-the-by, I suppose I should have heard of that."

"It is nothing about the fair Zéphine—wrong again!—That is *two!*"

"Barbara has got leave to stay till Easter!"

"Nothing about Barbara!"—(with a slight momentary pang at the ease and unconcern with which he mentions her name.—"By-the-by, I wish you would give up calling her 'Barbara;' she never calls you 'Frank!' There, you have had your three guesses, and you have never come within a mile of it—I shall have to tell you—*Roger is coming back!*" opening my eyes and beginning to laugh joyously.

"*Soon?*" with a quick and breathless change of tone, that I cannot help perceiving, turning sharply upon me.

"*At once!*" reply I, triumphantly; "we may expect him *any day!*"

He receives this information in total silence. He does not attempt the faintest or slightest congratulation.

"I wish I had not told you!" cry I, indignantly; "what a fool I was to imagine that you would feel the slightest interest in any thing that did not concern yourself personally! Of course (turning a scarlet face and blazing eyes full upon him), "I did not expect you to *feel* glad—I have known you too long for that—but you might have had the common civility to *say* you were!"

We have stopped. We stand facing each other in the narrow wood-path, while the beck noisily babbles past, and the thrushes answer each other in lovely dialogue. He is deadly pale; his lips are trembling, and his eyes—involuntarily I look away from them!

"I am *not* glad!" he says, with slow distinctness; "often—often you have blamed me for *hinting* and *implying*, for using innuendoes and half-words, and once—*once*, do you recollect?—you told me to my face that I *lied!* Well, I will not *lie* now; you shall have no cause to blame me to-day. I will tell you the truth, the truth that you know as well as I do—I am *not* glad!"

Absolute silence. I could no more answer or interrupt him than I could soar up between the dry tree-boughs to heaven. I stand before him with parted lips, and staring eyes fixed in a stony, horrid astonishment on his face.

"Nancy," he says, coming a step nearer, and speaking in almost a whisper, "*you* are not glad either! For once speak the truth! Hypocrisy is always difficult to you. You are the worst actress I ever saw—speak the truth for once! Who is there to hear you but me? I, who know it already—who have known it ever since that first evening in Dresden! Do you recollect?—but of course you do—why do I ask you? Why should you have forgotten any more than I?"

Still I am silent. Though I stand in the free clear air of heaven, I could not feel more choked and gasping were I in some close and stifling dungeon, hundreds of feet underground. I think that the brook must have got into my brain, there is such a noise of bubbling and brawling in it. Barbara, Roger, Algy, a hundred confused ideas of pain and dismay jostle each other in my head.

"Why do you look at me so?" he says, hoarsely. "What have I done? For God's sake, do not think that I blame you! I never have been so sorry for any one in my life as I have been for you—as I was for you from the first moment I saw you! I can see you now, as I first caught sight of you—weariness and depression in every line of your face—"

I can bear no more. At his last words, a pain like a knife, sharp to agony, runs through me. It is the grain of truth in his wicked, lying words that gives them their sting. I *was* weary; I *was* depressed; I *was* bored. I fling out my arms with a sudden gesture of despair, and then, throwing myself down on the ground, bury my face in a great moss cushion, and put my fingers in my ears.

"O my God!" I cry, writhing, "what *shall* I do?—how *can* I bear it?"

After a moment or two I sit up.

"How *shameful* of you!" I cry, bursting into a passion of tears. "What sort of women can you have lived among? what a hateful mind you must have! And I thought that you were a nice fellow, and that we were all so comfortable together!"

He has drawn back a pace or two, and now stands leaning against one of the bent and writhen trunks of the old trees. He is still as pale as the dead, and looks all the paler for the burning darkness of his eyes.

"Is it possible," he says, in a low tone of but half-suppressed fury, "that you are going to *pretend* to be surprised?"

"*Pretend!*" cry I, vehemently; "there is no pretense about it! I never was so horribly, miserably surprised in all my life!"

And then, thinking of Barbara, I fall to weeping again, in utter bitterness and discomfiture.

"It is *impossible!*" he says, roughly. "Whatever else you are, you are no fool; and a woman would have had to be blinder than any mole not to see whither I—yes, and *you*, too—have been tending? If you meant to be *surprised* all along when it came to this, why did you make yourself common talk for the neighborhood with me? Why did you press me, with such unconventional eagerness to visit you? Why did you reproach me if I missed one day?"

"*Why did I?*" cry I, eagerly. "Because—"

Then I stop suddenly. How, even to clear myself, can I tell him my real reason?

"And now," he continues, with deepening excitement, "now that you reap your own sowing, you are *surprised—miserably surprised!*"

"I am!" cry I, incoherently. "You may not believe me, but it is true—as true as that God is above us, and that I never, *never* was tired of Roger!"

I stop, choked with sobs.

"Yes," he says, sardonically, "about as true. But, be that as it may, you must at least be good enough to excuse me from expressing *joy* at his return, seeing that he fills the place which I am fool enough to covet, and which, but for him, *might*—yes, say what you please, deny it as much as you like—*would* have been mine!"

"It *never* would!" cry I, passionately. "If you had been the last man in the world—if we had been left together on a desert island I *never* should have liked you, *never!* I *never* would have seen more of you than I could help! There is *no one* whose society I grow so soon tired of. I have said so over and over again to the boys."

"Have you?"

"What good reason can you give me for preferring you to him?" I ask, my voice trembling and quivering with a passionate indignation; "I am here, ready to listen to you if you can! How are you such a desirable substitute for him? Are you nobler? cleverer? handsomer? unselfisher?—if you are" (laughing bitterly), "you keep it mighty well hid."

No reply: not a syllable.

"It is a *lie*," I cry, with growing vehemence, "a vile, base, groundless lie, to say that I am not glad he is coming back! Barbara knows—they *all* know how I have been *wearying* for him all these months. I was not *in love*, as you call it, when I married him—often I have told him that—and perhaps at Dresden I missed the boys a little—he knows that too—he understands! but now—*now*—" (clasping my hands upon my heart, and looking passionately upward with streaming eyes), "I want no one—*no one* but him! I wish for nothing better than to have *him—him only!*—and to-day, until I met *you*,—till you made me loathe myself and you, and every living thing—it seemed to me as if all the world had suddenly grown bright and happy and good at the news of his coming."

Still he is silent.

"Even if I had not liked *him*," pursue I, finding words come quickly enough now, and speaking with indignant volubility, as, having risen, I again face him—"even if I had wanted to flirt with some one, why on earth should I have chosen *you?*" (eying him with scornful slowness, from his wide-awake to his shooting-boots), "*you*, who never even *amused* me in the least! Often when I have been talking to you, I have yawned till the tears came into my eyes! I have been afraid that you would notice it. If I had known" (speaking with great bitterness), "I should have taken less pains with my manners."

He does not answer a word. What answer *can* he make? He still stands under the wintry tree, white to lividness; drops of cold sweat stand on his brows; and his fine nostrils dilate and contract, dilate and contract, in an agony of anger and shame.

"What *could* have put such an idea into your head?" cry I, clasping my hands, while the tears rain down my cheeks, as—my thoughts again flying to Barbara—I fall from contempt and scorn to the sharpest reproach. "Who would have thought of such a thing? when there are so many better and prettier people who, for all I know, might have liked you. What wicked perversity made you fix upon *me* who, even if I had not belonged to any one else, could never, *never* have fancied you!"

"Is that true?" he says, in a harsh, rough whisper; "are you sure that you are not deceiving yourself? are you sure that under all your rude words you are not nearer loving me than you think?—that it is not that—with that barrier between us—you cannot reconcile it to your conscience—"

"Quite, *quite* sure!" interrupt I, with passionate emphasis, looking back unflinchingly into the angry depths of his eyes, "it has nothing to say to conscience! it has nothing to say to the *wrongness* of it"—(crimsoning as I speak). "If it were quite right—if it were my *duty*—if it were the only way to save myself from *hanging*" (reaching after an ever higher and higher climax), "I *never*, NEVER could say that I was fond of you! I do not see what there is to be fond of *in* you! before God, I do not!"

"There!" he says, hoarsely, stretching out his hand, as if to ward off a blow, "that will do!—stop!—you will never outdo that!"

A moment's pause.

Down in the loneliness of this dell, the twilight is creeping quickly on: when once it begins it tarries not. Out in the open country I dare say that it is still broad daylight; but here, the hues of the moss carpet are growing duller, and the brook is darkening. In a sudden panic, I hastily catch up my hat, which has fallen to the ground, and without a word or look of farewell, begin to run fast along the homeward path. Before I have gone ten yards he has overtaken me. His face is distorted by passion out of all its beauty.

"Nancy," he says, in a voice rendered almost unrecognizable by extreme agitation, walking quickly alongside of me, "we are not going to part like this!"

"Do not call me Nancy!" cry I, indignantly; "it makes me *sick!*"

"What does it matter what I call you?" he cries, impatiently; "of what consequence is such a trifle? I will call you by what name you please, but for this once you *must* listen to me. I know, as well as you do, that it is my last chance!"

"*That* it is!" put in I, viciously.

The path is beginning to rise. After mounting the slope, we shall soon be out of the wood, and in the peopled open again.

"How can I help it, if I have gone mad?" he cries violently, evidently driven to desperation by the shortness of the time before him.

"Mad!" echo I, scornfully, "not a bit of it! you are as sane as I am!"

All this time we are posting along in mad haste. Thank God! the high-road is in sight, the cheerful, populous, light high-road. The trees grow thinner, and the path broadens. Even from here, we can plainly see the carts and carters. He stops, and making me stop, too, snatches both my hands.

"Nancy!" he says, harshly, stooping over me, while his eyes flame with a haggard light. "Yes I *will* call you so this once—to me now you *are* Nancy! I will *not* call you by *his* name! Is it *possible?* You may say that it is my egotism; but, at a moment like this, what is the use of shamming—of polite pretense? Never, *never* before in all my life have I given love without receiving it, and I *cannot* believe"—(with an accent of passionate entreaty)—"that I do now! Feeling for you as I do, do you feel absolutely *nothing* for me?"

"*Feel!*" cry I, driven out of all moderation by disgust and exasperation. "Would you like to know how I feel? I feel *as if a slug had crawled over me!*"

His face contracts, his eyes darken with a raging pain. He *throws* my hands—the hands a moment ago so jealously clasped—away from him.

"Thank you!" he says, after a pause, in a stiff voice of constraint. "I am satisfied!"

"And a very good thing too!" say I, sturdily, still at boiling-point, and diminishing

with quick steps the small space still intervening between me and the road.

"Stay!" he says, overtaking me once again, as I reach it, and laying his hand in detention on my arm. "One word more! I should be sorry to part from you—such friends as we have been"—(with a sneer)—"without *one* good wish. Lady Tempest, I hope"—(smiling with malevolent irony)—"that your fidelity will be rewarded as it deserves."

"I have no doubt of it!" reply I, steadily; but even as I speak, a sharp, jealous pain runs through my heart. Thank God! he cannot see it!

CHAPTER XXXI.

Yes, here out in the open it is still quite light; it seems two hours earlier than it did below in the dark dingle—light enough as plainly to see the faces of those one meets as if it were mid-day. I suppose that my late companion and I were too much occupied by our own emotions to hear, or at least notice the sound of wheels approaching us; but no sooner have I turned and left him, before I have gone three paces, than I am quickly passed by an open carriage and pair of grays—*quickly*, and yet slowly enough for me to recognize the one occupant. As to her—for it is Mrs. Huntley—she must have seen me already as I stood with Mr. Musgrave on the edge of the wood, exchanging our last bitter words.

It is impossible that she could have helped it; but even had it been possible—had there been any doubt on the subject, that doubt would be removed by the unusual animation of her attitude, and the interest in her eyes, that I have time to notice, as she rolls past me.

I avert my face, but it is too late. She has seen my hat thrown on anyhow, as it were with a pitchfork—has seen my face swollen with weeping, and great tears still standing unwiped on my flushed cheeks. What is far, *far* worse, she has seen him too. This is the last drop in an already over-full cup.

There is nothing in sight now—not even a cart—so I sit down on a heap of stones by the road-side, and, covering my hot face with my hands, cry till I have no more eyes left to cry with. Can *this* be the day I called good? Can *this* be that bright and merry day, when I walked elate and laughing between the deep furrows, and heard the blackbird and thrush woo their new loves, nor was able myself to refrain from singing?

My brain is a black chaos of whirling agonies, now together, now parting; so that each may make their separate sting felt, and, in turn, each will have to be faced. Preëminent among the dark host, towering above even the thought of Barbara, is the sense of my own degradation. There must have been something in my conduct to justify his taking me so confidently for the bad, light woman he did. One does not get such a character for nothing. I have always heard that, when such things happen to people, they have invariably brought them on themselves. In incoherent misery, I run over in my head, as well as the confusion of it will let me, our past meetings and dialogues. In almost all, to my distorted view, there now seems to have been an unseemly levity. Things I have said to him; easy, familiar jokes that I have had with him; not that *he* ever had much sense of a jest—(even at this moment I think this incidentally)—course through my mind.

Our many *tête-à-têtes* to which, at the time, I attached less than no importance: through many of which I unfeignedly, irresistibly *gaped;* our meetings in the park—accidental as I thought—our dawdling saunters through the meadows, as often as not at twilight; all *all* recur to me, and, recurring, make my face burn with a hot and stabbing shame.

And *Roger!* This is the way in which I have kept things straight for him! This is the way in which I have rewarded his boundless trust! he, whose only fear was lest I should be dull! lest I should not amuse myself! Well, I have amused myself to some purpose now. I have made myself *common talk for the neighborhood! He* said so. I have brought discredit on Roger's honored name! Not even the consciousness of the utter cleanness of my heart is of the least avail to console me. What matter how clean the heart is, if the conduct be light? None but God can see the former; the latter lies open to every carelessly spiteful, surface-judging eye. And Barbara! Goaded by the thought of her, I rise up quickly, and walk hastily along the road, till I reach a gate into the park. Arrived there, and now free from

all fear of interruption from passers-by, I again sit down on an old dry log that lies beneath a great oak, and again cover my face with my hands.

What care I for the growing dark? the darker the better! Ah! if it were dark enough to hide me from myself! How shall I break it to her—I, who, confident in my superior discernment, have always scouted her misgivings and turned into derision her doubts? If I thought that she would rave and storm, and that her grief would vent itself in *anger*, it would not be of half so much consequence. But I know her better. The evening has closed in colder. The birds have all ceased their singing, and I still sit on, in the absolute silence, unconscious—unaware of any thing round me; living only in my thoughts, and with a resolution growing ever stronger and stronger within me. I will *not* tell her! I will *never* tell *any one*. I, that have hitherto bungled and blundered over the whitest fib, will wade knee-deep in falsehoods, before I will ever let any one guess the disgrace that has happened to me. O that by long silence, I could wipe it out of my own heart—out of the book of unerasable past deeds!

Of course, by the cessation of his visits, Barbara will learn her fate in time. *In time.* Yes! but till then—till the long weeks in their lapse have brought the certainty of disappointment and mistake? How can I—myself knowing—watch her gentle confidence (for latterly her doubts—and whose would not?—have been set at rest) decline through all the suffering stages of uneasy expectation and deferred hope, to the blank, dull sickness of despair? How, without betraying myself, see her daily with wistful eyes looking—with strained ears listening—for a face and a step that come not? If she were one to love lightly, one of the many women who, when satisfied that it is no longer any use to cry and strive for the unattainable, the out of reach, clip and pare their affections to fit the unattainable, the within reach—! But I know differently.

Hitherto, whenever love has been offered to her—and the occasions have been not few—she has put it away from her; most gently, indeed, with a most eager desire to pour balm and not vinegar into the wounds she has made; with a most sincere sorrow and a disproportioned remorse at being obliged to cause pain to any living thing; yet, with a quiet and indifferent firmness, that left small ground for lingering hopes. And now, having once loved, she will be slow to unlove again.

It is quite dark now—as dark, at least, as it will be all night—and two or three stars are beginning to quiver out, small and cold, in the infinite distances of the sky. The sight of them, faintly trembling between the bare boughs of the trees, is the first thing that calls me back to the consciousness of outward things. Again I rise, and begin to walk, stumbling through the long wet knots of the unseen grass, toward the house. But when I reach it—when I see the red gleams shining through the chinks of the window-shutters—my heart fails me. Not yet can I face the people, the lights—Barbara! I turn into the garden, and pace up and down the broad, lonely walks: I pass and repass the cold river-gods of the unplaying fountain. I stand in the black night of the old cedar's shade. On any other day no possible consideration would have induced me to venture within the jurisdiction of its inky arms after nightfall; to-day, I feel as if no earthly or unearthly thing would have power to scare me. How long I stay, I do not know. Now and then, I put up my hands to my face, to ascertain whether my cheeks and eyes feel less swollen and burning; whether the moist and searching night-air is restoring me to my own likeness. At length, I dare stay no longer for fear of being missed, and causing alarm in the household. So I enter, steal up-stairs, and open the door of my boudoir, which Barbara and I, when alone, make our usual sitting-room. The candles are unlit; and the warm fire—evidently long undisturbed—is shedding only a dull and deceiving light on all the objects over which it ranges. So far, at least, Fortune favors me. Barbara and Vick are sitting on the hearth-rug, side by side. As I enter, they both jump up, and run to meet me. One of them gives little raptured squeaks of recognition. The other says, in a tone of relief and pleasure:

"Here you are! I was growing so frightened about you! What can have made you so late?"

"It was so—so—pleasant! The thrushes

were singing so!" reply I, thus happily inaugurating my career of invention.

"But, my dear child, the thrushes went to bed two hours ago!"

"Yes," I answer, at once entirely nonplussed, "so they did!"

"Where *have* you been?" she asks, in a tone of ever-increasing surprise. "Did you go farther than you intended?"

"I went—to see—the old Busseys," reply I, slowly; inwardly pondering, with a stupid surprise, as to whether it can possibly have been no longer ago than this very afternoon, that the old man mistook me for the dead Belinda—and that I held the old wife's soapy hand in farewell in mine; "the—old—Busseys!" I repeat, "and it took—me a long—*long* time to get home!"

I shiver as I speak.

"You are cold!" she says, anxiously. "I hope you have not had a chill—" (taking my hands in her own slight ones)—"yes—*starved!*—poor dear hands; let me rub them!" (beginning delicately to chafe them).

Something in the tender solicitude of her voice, in the touch of her gentle hands, gives me an agony of pain and remorse. I snatch away my hands.

"No! no!" I cry, brusquely, "they do very well!"

Again she looks at me, with a sort of astonishment, a little mixed with pain; but she does not say any thing. She goes over to the fire, and stoops to take up the poker.

"Do not!" cry I, hastily, "there is plenty of light!—I mean—" (stammering) "it—it—dazzles me, coming in out of the dark."

As I speak, I retire to a distant chair, as nearly as possible out of the fire-light, and affect to be occupied with Vick, who has jumped up on my lap, and—with all a dog's delicate care not to hurt you *really*—is pretending severely to bite every one of my fingers. Barbara has returned to the hearth-rug. She looks a little troubled at first; but, after a moment or two, her face regains its usual serene sweetness.

"And I have been here ever since you left me!" she says, presently, with a look of soft gayety. "I have had *no* visitors! Not even"—(blushing a little)—"the usual one."

"No?" say I, bending down my head over Vick, and allowing her to have a better and more thorough lick at the bridge of my nose than she has ever enjoyed in her life before.

"*You* did not meet him, I suppose?" she says, interrogatively.

"*I!*" cry I, starting guiltily, and stammering. "Not I! Why—why should I?"

"Why should not you, rather?" she says, laughing a little. "It is not such a *very* unusual occurrence?"

"Do you think not?" I say, in a voice whose trembling is painfully perceptible to myself. "You do not think I—I—" ("You do not think I met him on purpose," I am going to say; but I break off suddenly, aware that I am betraying myself).

"He will come earlier to-morrow to make up for it"—she says, in a low voice, more to herself than to me—"yes"—(clasping her hands lightly in her lap, while the fire-light plays upon the lovely mildness of her happy face, and repeating the words softly)—"yes, he will come earlier to-morrow!"

I *cannot* bear it. I rise up abruptly, trundling poor Vick, to whom this reverse is quite unexpected, down on the carpet, and rushing out of the room.

. . . . .

It is evening now—late evening, drawing toward bedtime. I am sitting with my back to the light, and have asked for a shade for the lamp, on the plea that the wind has cut my eyes—but, in spite of my precautions, I am well aware that the disfigurement of my face is still unmistakably evident to the most casual eye; and, from the anxious care with which Barbara looks *away from me*, when she addresses me, I can perceive that she has observed it, as, indeed, how could she fail to do? If Tou Tou were here, she would overwhelm me with officious questions—would stare me crazy, but Barbara averts her eyes, and asks nothing.

We have been sitting in perfect silence for a long while; no noise but the click of Barbara's knitting-pins, the low flutter of the fire-flame, and the sort of suppressed, choked, *inward* bark, with which Vick attacks a phantom tomcat in her dreams.

Suddenly I speak.

"Barbara!" say I, with a hard, forced laugh, "I am going to ask you a silly question: tell me, did you ever observe—has it

ever struck you that there was something rather—rather *offensive* in my manner to men?"

Her knitting drops into her lap. Her blue eyes open wide, like dog-violets in the sun; she is *obliged* to look at me now.

"*Offensive!*" she echoes, with an accent of the most utter surprise and mystification. "Good Heavens, no! What has come to the child? Oh!"—(with a little look of dawning intelligence)—"I see! You mean, do not you smite them too much? Are not you sometimes a little too *hard* upon them?"

"No," say I, gravely; "I did not mean that."

She looks at me for explanation, but I can give none. More silence.

Vick is either in hot pursuit of, or hot flight from, the tomcat; all her four legs are quivering and kicking in a mimic gallop.

"Do you remember," say I, again speaking, and again prefacing my words by an uneasy laugh, "how the boys at home used always to laugh at me, because I never knew how to flirt, nor had any pretty ways? Do you think"—(speaking slowly and hesitatingly)—"that boys—one's brothers, I mean—would be good judges of that sort of thing?"

"As good as any one else's brothers, I suppose," she says, with a low laugh, but still looking puzzled; "but why do you ask?"

"I do not know," reply I, trying to speak carelessly; "it came into my head."

"Has any one been accusing you?" she says, a little curiously. "But no! who *could?* You have seen no one, not even—"

"No, no!" interrupt I, shrinking from the sound of the name that I know is coming; "of course not; no one!"

The clock strikes eleven, and wakes Vick. Barbara rises, rolls up her knitting, and going over to the fireplace, stands with one white elbow resting on the chimney-piece, and slender neck drooped, pensively gazing at the low fire.

"Do you know," she says, with a half-confused smile, that is also tinged with a little anxiety, "I have been thinking—it is the first time for three months that he has not been here at all, either in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening!"

"Is it?" say I, slightly shivering.

"I think," she says, with a rather embarrassed laugh, "that he must have heard *you* were out, and that that was why he did not come. You know I always tell you that he likes you best."

She says it, as a joke, and yet her great eyes are looking at me with a sort of wistfulness, but neither to *them* nor to her words can I make any answer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NEXT morning I am sitting before my looking-glass—never to me a pleasant article of furniture—having my hair dressed. I am hardly awake yet, and have not quite finished disentangling the real live disagreeables which I have to face, from the imaginary ones from which my waking has freed me. At least, in real life, I am not perpetually pursued, through dull abysses, by a man in a crape mask, from whom I am madly struggling to escape, and who is perpetually on the point of overtaking and seizing me.

It was a mistake going to sleep at all last night. It would have been far wiser and better to have kept awake. The *real* evils are bad enough, but the dream ones in their vivid life make me shiver even now, though the morning sun is lying in companionable patches on the floor, and the birds are loudly talking all together. Do *no* birds ever listen?

Distracted for a moment from my own miseries, by the noise of their soft yet sharp hubbub, I am thinking this, when a knock comes at the door, and the next moment Barbara enters. Her blond hair is tumbled about her shoulders; no white rose's cheeks are paler than hers; in her hand she has a note. In a moment I have dismissed the maid, and we are alone.

"I want you to read this!" she says, in an even and monotonous voice, from which, by an effort whose greatness I can dimly guess, she keeps all sound of trembling.

I have risen and turned from the glass; but now my knees shake under me so much that I have to sit down again. She comes behind me, so that I may no longer see her: and putting her arms round my neck, and hiding her face in my unfinished hair, says, whisperingly:

"Do not fret about it, Nancy!—I do not mind much."

Then she breaks into quiet tears.

"Do you mean to say that he has had the *insolence* to write to you," I cry, in a passion of indignation, forgetting for the moment Barbara's ignorance of what has occurred, and only reminded of it by the look of wonder that, as I turn on my chair to face her, I see come into her eyes.

"Have not you been expecting him every day to write to me?" she asks, with a little wonder in her tone; "but *read!*" (pointing to the note, and laughing with a touch of bitterness), "you will soon see that there is no *insolence* here."

I had quite as lief, in my present state of mind, touch a yard-long wriggling ground-worm, or a fat wood-louse, as paper that his fingers have pressed; but I overcome my repulsion, and unfold the note.

"DEAR MISS GREY:

"Can I do any thing for you in town? I am going up there to-morrow, and shall thence, I think, run over to the Exhibition. I have no doubt that it is just like all the others; but *not* to have seen it will set one at a disadvantage with one's fellows. I am afraid that there is no chance of your being still at Tempest when I return. I shall be most happy to undertake any commissions.

"Yours sincerely,

"F. MUSGRAVE."

The note drops from my fingers, rolls on to my lap, and thence to the ground. I sit in stiff and stupid silence. To tell the truth, I am trying strongly to imagine how I should look and what I should say, were I as ignorant of causes as Barbara thinks me, and to look and speak accordingly.

She kneels down beside me, and softly drawing down my face till it is on a level with hers, and our cheeks touch, says in a tone of gentle entreaty and compassion, as if *I* were the one to be considered—the prime sufferer:

"Do not fret about it, Nancy! it is of no —no consequence!—there is no harm done!"

I struggle to say *something*, but for the life of me I can frame no words.

"It was my own fancy!" she says, falteringly; "I suppose my vanity misled me!"

"It is all my fault!" cry I, suddenly finding passionate words, starting up, and beginning to walk feverishly too and fro—"*all!*—there never was any one in all this world so blind, so ill-judging, so miserably mistaken! If it had not been for me, you never would have thought twice of him—never; and I"—(beginning to speak with weeping indistinctness)—"I thought it would be so nice to have you near me—I thought that there was nothing the matter with him but his temper; *many* men are ill-tempered—nearly *all*. If" (tightly clinching my hands and setting my teeth) "I had had any idea of his being the *scoundrel* that he is—"

"But he is not," she interrupts quickly, wincing a little at my words; "indeed he is not! What ill have we heard from him? If you do not mind" (laying her hand with gentle entreaty on my arm), "I had rather, *far* rather, that you did not say any thing hard of him! I was always so glad that you and he were such friends—always—and I do not know why—there is no sense in it; but I am glad of it still."

"We were *not* friends," say I, writhing a little; "why do you say so?"

She looks at me with a great and unfeigned astonishment.

"*Not friends!*" she echoes, slowly repeating my words; then, seeing the expression of my face, stops suddenly.

"Are you *sure*," cry I, feverishly snatching her hands and looking with searching anxiety into her face, "that you spoke truth just now?—that you do not mind much—that you will get over it!—that it will not *kill* you?"

"*Kill* me!" she says, with a little sorrowful smile of derision; "no, no! I am not so easily killed."

"Are you *sure?*" persist I, with a passionate eagerness, still reading her tear-stained face, "that it will not take the taste out of every thing?—that it will not make you hate all your life?—it would me."

"*Quite* sure!—certain!" she says, looking back at me with a steady meekness, though her blue eyes brim over; "because God has taken from me *one* thing—one that I never had any right to expect—should I do well, do you think, to quarrel with all that He has left me?"

"I cannot answer; her godly patience is too high a thing for me."

"Even if my life *were* spoilt," she goes on, after a moment or two, her voice gaining firmness, and her face a pale serenity, "even if it were—but it is *not*—indeed it is not. In a very little while it will seem to me as good and pleasant and full as ever; but even if it *were*" (looking at me with a lovely confidence in her eyes), "it would be no such very great matter—*this* life is not every thing!"

"Is not it?" say I, with a doubting shiver. "Who can tell you that? who knows?"

"*No one* has been to blame," she continues, with a gentle persistence. "I should like you to see that! There has been only a—a—*mistake*" (her voice failing a little again), "a mistake that has been corrected in time, and for which no one—*no one*, Nancy, is the worse!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

So this is the way in which Barbara's hope dies! Our hopes have as many ways of dying as our bodies. Sometimes they pine and fall into a slow consumption, we nursing, cockering, and physicking them to the last. Sometimes they fall down dead suddenly, as one that in full health, with his bones full of marrow, and his eyes full of light, drops wordless into the next world unaware. This last has been Barbara's case. When she thought it healthiest, and most vigorous in its stalwart life, then the death-mark was on it. To most of us, O friends, troubles are as great stones cast unexpectedly on a smooth road; over which, in a dark night, we trip, and grumblingly stumble, cursing, and angrily bruising our limbs. To a few of us, they are ladders, by which we climb to God; hills, that lift us nearer heaven—that heaven, which, however certainly—with whatever mathematical precision—it has been demonstrated to us that it exists not here, nor there, nor yet anywhere, we still dimly, with yearning tears and high longings, grasp at. Barbara has always looked heavenward. In all her mirth, God has mixed. Now, therefore, in this grief that He has sent her—this ignoble grief, that yet cuts none the less deeply for being ignoble, and excluding the solace of human sympathy, she but thrusts her hand with a fuller confidence in his, and fixes her sweet eyes with a more reverent surety on the one prime consoler of humankind, who, from his Cross, has looked royally down the toiling centuries—the king, whom this generation, above all generations, is laboring—and, as not a few think, *successfully*—to discrown. To her, his kingship is as unquestioned as when heretics and paynims burnt to prove it.

Often, since then, in those vain longings that come to each of us, I suppose, I tried in after-days—sometimes I try now, to stretch my arms out wide backward toward the past—to speak the words that would have been as easily spoken then as any other—that no earthly power can ever make spoken words now, of sympathy and appreciation to Barbara.

I did say loving things, but they seem to me now to have been but scant and shabby. Why did not I say a great many more? Oh, all of you who live with those that are dearer to you than they seem, tell them every day how much you love them! at the risk of *wearying* them, tell them, I pray you: it will save you, perhaps, many after-pangs.

I think that, at this time, there are in me *two* Nancys—Barbara's Nancy, and Roger's Nancy; the one so vexed, thwarted, and humiliated in spirit, that she feels as if she never could laugh quite heartily again; the other, so utterly and triumphantly glad, that any future tears or trials seem to her in the highest degree improbable. And Barbara herself is on the side of this latter. From her hopeful speech and her smiles, you would think that some good news had come to her—that she was on the eve of some long-looked-for, yet hardly-hoped prosperity. Not that she is unnaturally or hysterically lively—an error into which many, making such an effort and struggle for self-conquest, would fall. Barbara's mirth was never noisy, as mine and the boys so often was. Perhaps—nay, I have often thought since, *certainly*—she weeps as she prays, in secret; but God is the only one who knows of her tears, as of her prayers. She has always been one to go halves in her pleasures, but of her sorrows she will give never a morsel to any one.

Her very quietness under her trouble—her silence under it—her equanimity—mislead me. It is the impulse of any hurt thing to cry out. I, myself, have always done it. Half unconsciously, I am led by this reasoning to think

that Barbara's wound cannot be very deep, else would she shrink and writhe beneath it. So I talk to her all day, with merciless length, about Roger. I go through all the old queries. I again critically examine my face, and arrive—not only at the former conclusion, that one side is worse-looking than the other, but also that it looks ten years older.

I have my flax hair built in many strange and differing fashions, and again *un*built: piled high, to give me height; twisted low, in a vain endeavor to liken me to the Greeks; curled, plaited, frizzed, and again unfrizzed. I institute a searching and critical examination of my wardrobe, rejecting this and that; holding one color against my cheek, to see whether my pallor will be able to bear it; turning away from another with a grimace of self-disgust.

And this is the same "*I*" who thought it so little worth while to win the good opinion of father's blear-eyed old friend, that I went to my first meeting with him with a scorched face, loose hair, tottering, all through prayers, on the verge of a descent about my neck, and a large round hole, smelling horribly of singeing, burnt in the very front of my old woolen frock.

His coming is near now. This *very* day I shall see him come in that door. He will sit in that chair. His head will dent that cushion. I shall sit on a footstool at his feet. The better to imagine the position, I push a footstool into the desired neighborhood to Roger's arm-chair, and already see myself, with the eye of faith, in solid reality occupying it. I rehearse all the topics that will engage my tongue. The better to realize their effect upon him, I give utterance out loud to the many greetings, to the numberless fond and pretty things with which I mean to load him.

He always looked so very joyful when I said any little, civil thing to him, and I so seldom, *seldom* did. Ah! we will change all that! He shall be nauseated with sweets. And then, still sitting by him, holding his hand, and with my head (dressed in what I finally decide upon as the becomingest fashion) daintily rested on his arm, I will tell him all my troubles. I will tell him of Algy's estrangement, his cold looks and harsh words. Without any outspoken or bitter abuse of her, I will yet manage cunningly to set him on his guard against Mrs. Huntley. I will lament over Bobby to him. Yes, I will tell him *all* my troubles—*all*, that is, with one reservation.

Barbara is no longer here. She has gone home.

"You will be better by yourselves," she says, gently, when she announces her intention of going. "He will like it better. I should if I were he. It will be like a new honey-moon."

"*That* it will not," reply I, stoutly, recollecting how much I yawned, and how largely Mr. Musgrave figured in the first. "I have no opinion of honey-moons; no more would *you* if you had *had* one."

"*Should* not I?" speaking a little absently, while her eyes stray through the window to the serene coldness of the sky, and the pallid droop of the snow-drops in the garden-border.

"You are sure," say I, earnestly, taking her light hand in mine, "that you are not going because you think that you are not *wanted* now—that now, that I have my—my own property again" (smiling irrepressibly), "I can do very well without you?"

"*Quite* sure, Nancy!" looking back into my eager eyes with confident affection.

"And you will come back *very* soon? *very?*"

"When you quarrel," she answers, her face dimpling into a laugh, "I will come and make it up between you."

"You must come before *then*," say I, with a proud smile, "or your visit is likely to be indefinitely postponed."

Roger and I quarrel! We both find the idea so amusing that we laugh in concert.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"*Gertrude.* Is my knight come? O the Lord, my band! Sister, do my cheeks look well? Give me a little box o' the ear, that I may seem to blush."—EASTWARD HOE.

SHE is gone now. The atmosphere of the house seems less clear, less pure, now that she has left it. As she drives away, it seems to me, looking after her, that no flower ever had

a modester face, a more delicate bloom. If I had time to think about it, I should fret sorely after her, I should grievously miss her; but I have none.

The carriage that takes her to the station is to wait half an hour, and then bring back Roger. There is, therefore, not more than enough time for me to make the careful and lengthy toilet, on which I have expended so much painstaking thought. I have deferred making it till now, so that I may appear in perfect, dainty freshness, as if I had just emerged from the manifold silver papers of a bandbox, before him when he arrives—that not a hair of my flax head may be displaced from its silky sweep; that there may be no risk of Vick jumping up and defiling me with muddy paws that know no respect of clothes.

I take a long time over it. I snub my maid more than I ever did in my life before. But I am complete now; to the last pin I am finished. Perhaps, though this does not strike me till the last moment—perhaps I am rather, nay, more than *rather*, overdressed for the occasion. But surely this, in a person who has not long been in command of fine clothes, and even in that short time has had very few opportunities of airing them, is pardonable.

You remember that it is February. Well, then, this is the warm splendor in which I am clad. Genoa velvet, of the color of a dark sapphire, trimmed with silver-fox fur; and my head crowned with a mob-cap, concerning which I am in doubt, and should be nervously glad to have the boys here to enlighten me as to whether it is very becoming or rather ridiculous. The object of the mob-cap is to approximate my age to Roger's, and to assure all such as the velvet and fur leave in doubt, that I am entitled to take my stand among the portly ranks of British matrons.

"Algy was right," say I, soliloquizing aloud, as I stand before the long cheval glass, with a back-hair glass in one hand, by whose aid I correct my errors in the profile, three-quarters or back view; "mine is not the most hopeless kind of ugliness. It is certainly modifiable by dress."

So saying, I lay down the hand glass, and walk sedately down-stairs, holding my head stiffly erect, and looking over my shoulder, like a child, at the effect of my blue train sweeping down the steps after me.

Arrived in my boudoir, I go and stand by the window, though there are yet ten minutes before he is due. Once I open the casement to listen, but hastily close it again, afraid lest the wintry wind should ruffle the satin smoothness of my hair, or push the mob-cap awry. Then I sit carefully down, and, harshly repulsing an overture on the part of Vick to jump into my lap, fix my eyes upon the dark bare boughs of the tall and distant elms, from between which I shall see him steal into sight. The time ticks slowly on. He is due now. Five more lame, crawling minutes—ten!—no sign of him. Again I rise, unclose the casement, and push my matronly head a little way out to listen. Yes! yes! there is the distant but not doubtful sound of a horse's four hoofs smartly trotting and splashing along the muddy road. Three minutes more, and the sun catches and brightly gleams on one of the quickly-turning wheels of the dog-cart as it rolls toward me, between the wintry trees.

At first I cannot see the occupants; the boughs and twigs interpose to hide them; but presently the dog-cart emerges into the open. There is only one person in it!

At first I decline to believe my own eyes. I rub them. I stretch my head farther out. Alas! self-deception is no longer possible: the groom returns as he went—alone. Roger has *not* come!

The dog-cart turns toward the stables, and I run to the bell and pull it violently. I can hardly wait till it is answered. At last, after an interval, which seems to me like twenty minutes, but which that false, cold-blooded clock proclaims to be *two*, the footman enters.

"Sir Roger has not come," I say more affirmatively than interrogatively, for I have no doubt on the subject. "Why did not the groom wait for the next train?"

"If you please, my lady, Sir Roger *has* come."

"*Has come!*" repeat I, in astonishment, opening my eyes; "then where is he?"

"He is walking up, my lady."

"What! all the way from Bishopsthorpe?" cry I, incredulously, thinking of the five miry miles that intervene between us and that station. "*Impossible!*"

"No, my lady, not all the way; only from Mrs. Huntley's."

I feel the color rushing away from my

checks, and turn quickly aside, that my change of countenance may not be perceived.

"Did he get out there?" I ask, faintly.

"Mrs. Huntley was at the gate, my lady, and Sir Roger got down to speak to her, and bid James drive on and tell your ladyship he would be here directly."

"Very well," say I, unsteadily, still averting my face, "that will do."

He is gone, and I need no longer mind what color my face is, nor what shape of woful jealousy my late so complacent features assume.

So *this* is what comes of thinking life such a grand and pleasant thing, and this world such a lovely, satisfying paradise! Wait long enough—(I have not had to wait very long for my part)—and every sweet thing turns to gall-like bitterness between one's teeth! The experience of a few days ago might have taught me *that*, one would think, but I was dull to thick-headedness. I required *two* lessons—the second, oh how far harsher than even the first!

In a moment I have taken my resolution. I am racing up-stairs. I have reached my room. I do not summon my maid. One requires no assistance to enable one to *un*build, deface, destroy. In a *second*—in much less time than it takes me to write it—I have torn off the mob-cap, and thrown it on the floor. If I had done what I wished, if I had yielded to my first impulse, I should also have trampled upon it; but from the extremity of petualnce, I am proud to be able to tell you that I refrain. With rapid fingers I unbutton my blue-velvet gown, and step out of it, leaving it in a costly heap on the floor. Then I open the high folding-doors of the wardrobe, and run my eye over its contents; but the most becoming is no longer what I seek. For a moment or two I stand undecided, then my eye is caught by a venerable garment, loathly and ill-made, which I had before I married, and have since kept, more as a relic than any thing else—a gown of that peculiar shade of sallow, bilious, Bismarck brown, which is the most trying to the paleness of my skin. Before any one could say "Jack Robinson," it is down, and I am in it. Then, without even a parting smooth to the hair, which the violent off-tearing of my cap must have roughened and disheveled, I go down-stairs and reënter the boudoir. As I do so, I catch an accidental glimpse of myself in a glass. Good Heavens! Can three minutes (for I really have not been longer about it) have wrought such a monstrous metamorphosis? Is every woman as utterly dependent for her charms upon her *husk* as I am? Can this sad, sallow slip of a girl be the beaming, shapely, British matron I contemplated with so innocently pleased an eye half an hour ago? If, in all my designs, I could have the perfect success which has crowned my efforts at self-disfigurement, I should be among the most prosperous of my species.

I sit down as far from the window as the dimensions of the room will allow, call Vick, who comes at first sneakingly and doubtful of her reception, up on my lap, and take a book. It is the one nearest to my hand, and I plunge into it haphazard in the middle.

This is the sentence that first greets me: "Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much—more than God himself—yet she could not bear to pray to have her love for her child lessened."

Not a very difficult one to construe, is it? and yet, having come to the end, and found that it conveyed no glimmering of an idea to my mind, I begin it over again.

"Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much—more than God himself—yet she could not bear to pray to have her love for her child lessened."

Still no better! What *is* it all about?

I begin over again.

"Her whole heart was in her boy," etc. I go through this process ten times. I should go through it twenty, or even thirty, for I am resolved to go on reading, but at the end of the tenth, my ear—unconsciously strained—catches the sound of a step at the stair-foot. It is not the footman's. It is firmer, heavier, and yet quicker.

Eight weary months is it since I last heard that footfall. My heart pulses with mad haste, my cheeks throb, but I sit still, and hold the book before my eyes. I will *not* go to meet him. I will be as indifferent as he! When he opens the door, I will not even look round, I will be too much immersed in the page before me.

"Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that—"

The door-handle is turning. I *cannot* help it! Against my will, my head turns too. With no volition of my own—against my firmest intention—my feet carry me hastily toward him. My arms stretch themselves out. Thank God! thank God! whatever happens afterward I shall thank God, and call him good for allowing it. I am in Roger's embrace. No more mistakes! no more delays! he is here, and I am kissing him as I never kissed any one—as I certainly never kissed *him* in my life before.

Well, I suppose that in every life there are *some* moments that are *absolutely* good—that one could not mend even if one were given the power to try! I suppose that even those who, looking back over their history, say, most distinctly and certainly, "It was a failure," can yet lay the finger of memory on *some* such gold minutes—it may be only half a dozen, only four, only *two*—but still on some.

This is one of my gold moments, one of those misplaced ones that have strayed out of heaven, where, perhaps, they are *all* such—*perhaps*—one can't be *sure*, for what human imagination can grasp the idea of even a *day*, wholly made of such minutes?

I have forgotten Mrs. Huntley—Mr. Musgrave. Every ill suspicion, every stinging remembrance, is dead or fallen into a trance. All bad thoughts have melted away from the earth. Only joyful love and absolute faith remain, only the knowledge that Roger is mine, and I am his, and that we are in each other's arms. I do not know how long we remain without speaking. I do not imagine that souls in bliss ever think of looking at the clock. He is the first to break silence. For the first time for eight months I hear his voice again—the voice that for so many weeks seemed to me no better than any other voice—whose tones I *now* feel I could pick out from those of any other living thing, did all creation shout together.

"Let me look at my wife!" he says, taking my countenance in his tender hands, as if it were made of old china, and would break if he let it fall. "I feel as if I had never *had* a wife before, as if it were quite a new plaything."

I make no verbal answer. I am staring up with all my eyes into his face, thinking, with a sort of wonder, how much goodlier younger, statelier it is than it has appeared to me in any of those dream-pictures, which yet mostly flatter.

"My wife! my wife!" he says, speaking the words most softly, as if they greatly pleased him, and replacing with carefullest fingers a stray and arrant lock that has wandered from its fellows into my left eye. "What has come to you? Had I forgotten what you were like? How pretty you are! How well you look!"

"Do I?" say I, with a pleasant simper; then, with a sudden and overwhelming recollection of the bilious gingery frock, and the tousled hair, "No, nonsense!" I say, uneasily, "impossible! You are laughing at me! Ah!"—(with a sigh of irrepressible regret and back-handed pride)—"you should have seen me half an hour ago! I *did* look nice *then*, if you like."

"Why nicer than now?"—(with a puzzled smile that both plays about his bearded lips and gayly shines in his steel-gray eyes).

"Oh, never mind! never mind!" reply I, in some confusion, "it is a long story; it is of no consequence, but I *did*."

He does not press for an explanation, for which I am obliged to him.

"Nancy!" he says, with a sort of hesitating joy, a diffident triumph in his voice, "do you know, I believe you have kept your promise! I believe, I *really* believe, that you are a little glad to see me!"

"Are *you* glad to see *me*, is more to the purpose?" return I, descending out of heaven with a pout, and returning to the small jealousies and acerbities of earth, and to the recollection of that yet unexplained alighting at Aninda's gate.

"*Am I?*"

He seems to think that no asseverations, no strong adjectives or intensifying adverbs, no calling upon sun, and moon, and stars to bear witness to his gladness, can increase the force of those two tiny words, so he adds none.

"I wonder, then," say I, in a rather sneaky and shame-faced manner, mumbling and looking down, "that you were not in a greater hurry to get to me?"

"*In a greater hurry!*" he repeats, in an accent of acute surprise. "Why, child, what

are you talking about? Since we landed, I have neither slept nor eaten. I drove straight across London, and have been in the train ever since.

"But — between — this — and the — station?" suggest I, slowly, having taken hold of one of the buttons of his coat; the very one that in former difficulties I used always to resort to.

"You mean about my walking up?" he says, readily, and without the slightest trace of guilty consciousness—indeed, with a distinct and open look of pleasure; "but, my darling, how could I tell how long she would keep me? poor little woman!" (beginning to laugh, and to put back the hair from his tanned forehead). "I am afraid I did not bless her when I saw her standing at her gate! I had half a mind to ask her whether another time would not do as well, but she looked so eager to hear about her husband—you know I have been seeing him at St. Thomas—such a wistful little face—and I knew that she could not keep me more than ten minutes; and, altogether, when I thought of her loneliness and my own luck—"

He breaks off.

"Are you so sure she *is* lonely?" I say, with an innocent air of asking for information, and still working hard at the button; "are people always lonely when their husbands are away?"

He looks at me strangely for a moment; then, "Of course she is lonely, poor little thing!" he says, warmly; "how could she help it?"

A slight pause.

"*Most* men," say I, jealously, "would not have thought it a hardship to walk up and down between the laurestines with Mrs. Zéphine, I can tell you!"

"Would not they?" he answers, indifferently. "I dare say, not! she always *was* a good little thing!"

"Excellent!" reply I, with a nasty dryness, "bland, passionate, and deeply religious!"

Again he looks at me in surprise—a surprise which, after a moment's reflection, melts and brightens into an expression of pleasure.

"Did you care so much about my coming that ten minutes seemed to make a difference?" he asks, in an eager voice. "Is it possible that you were *in a hurry* for me?"

Why cannot I speak truth, and say yes? Why does an objectlessly lying devil make its inopportune entry into me? Through some misplaced and crooked false shame, I answer, "Not at all! not at all! of course, a few minutes, one way or the other, could not make much difference; I was only puzzled to know what had become of you?"

He looks a shade disappointed, and for a moment we are both silent. We have sat down side by side on the sofa. Vick is standing on her hinder legs, with her fore-paws rested on Roger's knee. Her tail is wagging with the strong and untiring regularity of a pendulum, and a smirk of welcome and recognition is on her face. Roger's arm is round me, and we are holding each other's hands, but we are no longer in heaven. I could not tell you *why*, but we are not. Some stupid constraint—quite of earth—has fallen upon me. Where are all those most tender words, those profuse endearments with which I meant to have greeted him?

"And so it is actually true!" he says with a long-drawn sigh of relief; his eyes wandering round the room, and taking in all the familiar objects; "there is no mistake about it! I am actually holding your real live hand" (turning it gently about, and softly considering the long, slight fingers, and pink palm)—"in mine! Ah! my dear, how often, how often I have held it so in my dreams! Have you ever" (speaking with a sort of doubtfulness and uncertain hope)—"have you ever—no, I dare say not—so held mine?"

The diffident passion in his voice for once destroys that vile constraint, dissipates that idiotic sense of bashfulness.

"*Scores* of times!" I answer, letting my head drop on his shoulder, and not taking the trouble to raise it again.

"I never *used* to think myself of a very nervous turn!" he says, presently, with a smile. "Nancy, you will laugh at me, but I assure you upon my honor, that all the way home I have been in the most abject and deadly fright: at every puff of wind I thought we were infallibly going to the bottom: whenever the carriage rocked in the least to-day on the way down, I made up my mind we were going to smash! Little woman, what can a bit of a thing like you have done to me to make me seem so much more valuable to myself than I have ever done these eight-and-forty years?"

I think no answer to this so suitable and seemly as a dumb friction of my left cheek against the rough cloth of the shoulder on which it has reposed itself.

"Talk to me, Nancy!" he says, in a quiet half-whisper of happiness. "Let me hear the sound of your voice! I am sick of my own; I have had a glut of that all these weary eight months; tell me about them all! How are they all? how are the boys?" (with a playful smile of recollection at what used to be my *one* subject, the one theme on which I was wont to wax illimitably diffuse). But now, at the magic name no pleasant garrulity overcomes me; only the remembrance of my worries; of all those troubles that I mean now to transfer from my own to Roger's broad shoulders, swoop down upon me.

I raise my head and speak with a clouded brow and a complaining tone.

"The Brat has gone back to Oxford," I say, gloomily; "Bobby has gone to Hong-Kong, and Algy has gone to *the dogs*—or, at least, is going there as hard as he can!"

"*To the dogs?*" (with an accent of surprise and concern); "what do you mean? what has sent him there?"

"You had better ask Mrs. Zéphine," reply I, bitterly, thinking, with a lively exasperation, of the changed and demoralized Algy I had last seen—soured, headstrong, and unhinged.

"*Zéphine!*" (repeating the name with an accent of thorough astonishment), "what on earth can *she* have to say to it?"

"Ah, *what?*" reply I, with oracular spite; then, overcome with remorse at the thought of the way in which I was embittering the first moments of his return, I rebury my face in his shoulder.

"I will tell you about that to-morrow," I say; "to-day is a good day, and we will talk only of good things and of good people."

He does not immediately answer. My remark seems to have buried him in thought. Presently, he shakes off his distraction, and speaks again.

"And Barbara? how is she? *She* has not" (beginning to laugh)—"*she* has not gone to the dogs, I suppose!"

"No," say I, slowly, not thinking of what I am saying, but with my thoughts wandering off to the greatest and sorest of my afflictions, "not yet."

"And" (smiling) "your plan. See what a good memory I have—your plan of marrying her to Musgrave, how does that work?"

"*My* plan!" cry I, tremulously, while a sudden torrent of scarlet pours all over my face and neck. "I do not know what you are talking about! I never had any such plan! Phew!" (lifting up the arm that is round my waist, hastily removing it, rising and going to the window), "how hot this room grows of an afternoon!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

So the king enjoys his own again, and Roger is at home. Not yet—and now it is the next morning—has his return become *real* to me. Still there is something phantom and visionary about it: still it seems to me open to question whether, if I look away from him for a moment, he may not melt and disappear into dream-land.

All through breakfast I am dodging and peeping from behind the urn to assure myself of the continued presence and substantial reality of the strong shoulders and bronze-colored face that so solidly and certainly face me. As often as I catch his eye—and this is not seldom, for perhaps he too has his misgivings about me—I smile, in a manner, half ashamed, half sneaky, and yet most wholly satisfied.

The sun, who is not by any means *always* so well-judging, often hiding his face with both hands from a wedding, and hotly and gaudily flaming down on a black funeral, is shining with a temperate February comeliness in at our windows, on our garden-borders; trying (and failing) to warm up the passionless melancholy of the chilly snow-drop families, trying (and succeeding) to add his quota to the joy that already fills and occupies our two hearts.

"How fine it is!" I cry, flying with unmatronly agility to the window, and playing a waltz on the pane. "That is right! I should have been so angry if it had rained; let us come out at once—I want to hear your opinion about the laurels; they want cutting badly, but I could not have them touched while you were away, though Bobby's fingers—

when he was here—itched to be hacking at them. Come, I have got on my strong boots on purpose!—*at once.*"

"*At once?*" he repeats, a little doubtfully turning over the letters that lie in a heap beside his plate. "Well, I do not know about *that*—duty first, and pleasure afterward. Had not I better go to Zéphine Huntley's *first*, and get it over?"

"To *Zéphine Huntley's?*" repeat I, my fingers suddenly breaking off in the middle of their tune, as I turn quickly round to face him; the smile disappearing from my face, and my jaw lengthening; "you do not mean to say that you are going there *again?*"

"Yes, *again!*" he answers, laughing a little, and slightly mimicking my tragic tone; "why not, Nancy?"

I make no answer. I turn away and look out; but I see a different landscape. It looks to me as if I were regarding it through dark-blue glass.

"I have got a whole sheaf of letters and papers from her husband for her," pursues Roger, apparently calmly, and utterly unaware of my discomfiture, "and I do not want to keep her out of them longer than I can help."

Still I make no rejoinder. My fingers stray idly up and down the glass; but it is no longer a giddy waltz that they are executing—if it is a tune at all, it is some little dirge.

"What has happened to you, Nancy?" says Roger, presently, becoming aware of my silence, rising and following me; "what are you doing—catching flies?"

"No," reply I, with an acrid smartness, "not I! I leave that to Mrs. Zéphine."

Once again he regards me with that look of unfeigned surprise, tinged with a little pain which yesterday I detected on his face. When I look at him, when my eyes rest on the brave and open honesty of his, my ugly, nipping doubts disappear.

"Do not go," say I, standing on tiptoe, so that my hands may reach his neck, and clasp it, speaking in my most beguiling half-whisper; "why should you fetch and carry for her? let John or William take her letters. Are you so sure" (with an irresistible sneer) "that she is in such a hurry for them?—stay with me this *one first* day!—*do, please—Roger.*"

It is the first time in all my history that I have succeeded in delivering myself of his Christian name to his face—frequently as I have fired it off in dialogue with myself, behind his back. It shoots out now with the loud suddenness of a mismanaged soda-water cork.

"*Roger!*" he repeats, in an accent of keen pleasure, catching me to his heart; "what! I am *Roger*, after all, am I? The 'general' has gone to glory at last, has he?—thank God!"

"I will ring and tell John at once," say I, with subtile amiability, disengaging myself from his arms, and walking quickly toward the bell.

"Stay!" he says, putting his hand on me in detention, before I have made two steps; "you must not! it is no use! John will not do, or William either: it is a matter of business. I have" (sighing) "to go through many of these papers with her."

"*You?*"

"Yes, *I*; why is that so surprising?"

"What possible concern is it of *yours?*" ask I, throwing the reins on the neck of my indignation, and urging that willing steed to a sharp gallop, crimsoning as I speak, and raising my voice, as has ever been our immemorial wont in home-broils. "For my part, I never saw any good come of people putting their fingers into their neighbors' pies!"

"Not even if those neighbors are the oldest friends they have in the world?" he says, gently, yet eying with some wonder—perhaps apprehension, for odd things frighten men—the small scarlet scold who stands swelling with ruffled feathers, and angry eyes, winking to keep the tears out of them, before him.

"I thought *father* was the oldest friend you had in the world!" say I with a jealous tartness; "you always *used* to tell us so."

"*Some* of my oldest friends, then," he answers, looking a little amused, "since you will have me so exact."

"If Mrs. Huntley is the oldest friend you have in the world," say I, acrimoniously, still sticking to his first and most offensive form of expression, and *heavily* accenting it, "I wonder that you never happened to mention her existence before you went."

"So do I," he says, a little thoughtfully. "I am not much of a friend, am I? but—"

(looking at me with that sincere and hearty tenderness which, as long as I am under its immediate influence, always disarms me) "my head was full of other things; and people drop out of one's life so; I had neither seen nor heard of her since—since she married."

("Since she was engaged to you," say I, mentally interlining this statement, "and threw you over because you were not rich enough! why cannot you be honest and say so?") but aloud give utterance to nothing but a shrewish and disbelieving "Hem!"

A pause. I do not know what Roger is thinking of, but I am following out my own train of thought; the fruit of which is this observation, made with an air of reflection:

"Mr. Huntley is a very rich man, I suppose?"

Roger laughs.

"*Rich!* poor Huntley! that is the very last thing his worst enemy could accuse him of why, he was obliged to run the constable two years ago."

"But I suppose," say I, slowly, "that he was better off—*well* off once—when she married him, for instance?"

"How did you know that?" he asks, a little surprised. "Who told you? Yes; at that time he was looked upon as quite a *parti*."

"Better off than *you*, I suppose?" say I, still speaking slowly, and reading the carpet, "I mean than you were then?"

Again he laughs.

"He might easily have been that? I had nothing but my younger son's portion and my pay; why, Nancy, I had an idea that I had told you that before."

"I dare say you did," reply I, readily, "but I like to hear it again."

Yet another pause.

"He is badly off now, then," say I, presently, with a faintly triumphant accent.

"About as badly off as it is possible to be," answers Roger, very gravely; "that is my business with his wife; she and I are trying to make an arrangement with his creditors, to enable him to come home."

"To come home!" echo I, raising my eyebrows in an artless astonishment; "but if he *does* come home, what will become of Algy and the *rest of them?*"

"The rest of *whom?*" asks Roger, but there is such a severity in his eye as he puts the question that it is not too much to say I *dare not* explain. The one thing hated of Roger's soul—the one thing for which he has no tolerance, and on which he brings to bear all the weight of his righteous wrath, is *scandal*. Not even me will he allow to nibble at a neighbor's fame.

"Is she much changed since you saw her last?" pursue I, presently, with infantile guilelessness; "was her hair *red* then? some people say it *used* to be black!"

I raise my eyes to his face as I put this gentle query in order the better to trace its effect; but the concern that I see in his countenance is so very much greater than any that I had intended to have summoned that I have no sooner hurled my dart than I repent me of having done it.

"Nancy!" he says, putting one hand under my chin, and stroking my hair with the other—"am I going to have a *backbiting* wife? Child! child! there was neither hatred nor malice in the little girl I found sitting at the top of the wall."

I do not answer.

"Nancy," he says again, in a voice of most thorough earnestness, "I have a favor to ask of you—I know when I put it in *that way*, that you will not say 'No;' if you do not mind, I had rather you did not abuse Zéphine Huntley!—for the matter of that, I had rather you did not abuse any one—it does not pay, and there is no great fun in it; but Zéphine *specially* not."

"Why *specially?*" cry I, breathing short and speaking again with a quick, raised voice. "I know that it is a bad plan abusing people, you need not tell me *that*, I know it as well as you do, and I never did it at home, before I married, *never!*—none of them ever accused me of it—I was always quite good-natured about people, *quite;* but why *she specially?* why is she to be more sacred than any one else?"

"It is an old story," he answers, passing his hand across his forehead with what looks to me like a rather weary gesture and sighing, "I do not know why I did not tell you before—did not I ever?—no, by-the-by, I remember I never did; well, I will tell you now, and then you will understand!"

"Do not!" cry I, passionately, putting my fingers in my ears, and growing scarlet,

while the tears rush in mad haste to my eyes, for I imagine that I well know what is coming. "I do not want to hear! I had rather not! I *hate* old stories." He looks at me in silent dismay. "I mean," say I, seeing that some explanation is needed, "that I know all about it!—I have heard it already! I have been told it."

"Been told it? By whom?"

"Never mind by whom!" reply I, removing my fingers from my ears, and covering with both hot hands my hotter face. "I *have* been told it! I *have* heard it, and, what is more, I *will not hear it again!*"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

When I rose this morning, I did not think that I should have cried before night; indeed, nothing would have seemed to me so unlikely. Cry! on the day of Roger's first back-coming! absurd! And yet now the morning is still quite young, and I have wept abundantly.

I am always rather good at crying. Tears with me do not argue any very profound depth of affliction. My tears have always been somewhat near my eyes, a fact well known to the boys, whom my pearly drops always leave as stolid and unfeeling as they found them. But the case is different with Roger. Either he is ignorant, or he has forgotten the facility with which I weep, and his distress is proportioned to his ignorance.

My eyes are dried again now, though they and my nose still keep a brave after-glow; and Roger and I are at one again. But, for my part, on this first day, I think it would have been pleasanter if we had never been at two. However, smiling peace is now again restored to us, and no one, to look at us, as we sit in my boudoir after breakfast, would think that we, or perhaps I should say I, had been so lately employed in chasing her away. As little would any one, looking at the blandness of Vick's profile, as she slumbers on the the window-seat in the sun, conjecture of her master-passion for the calves of strangers' legs.

"So you see that I *must* go, Nancy," says Roger, with a rather wistful appeal to my reason, of whose supremacy he is not, perhaps, quite so confident as he was when he got up this morning. "You understand, don't you, dear?"

I nod.

"Yes, I understand."

I still speak in a subdued and snuffly voice, but the wrath has gone out of me.

"Well, you—would you mind," he says, speaking rather hesitatingly, as not quite sure of the reception that his proposition may meet with—"would you mind coming with me as far as Zéphine's?"

"Do you mean come all the way, and go in with you and stay while you are there?" cry I, with great animation, as a picture of the strict supervision which, by this course of conduct, I shall be enabled to exercise over Mrs. Zéphine's oscillades, poses, and little verbal tendernesses, flashes before my mind's eye.

Roger looks down.

"I do not know about *that*," he says, slowly. "Perhaps she would not care to go into her husband's liabilities before a—a str—before a third person!"

"Two is company and three is none, in fact," say I, with a slight relapse into the disdainful and snorting mood.

He looks distressed, but attempts no argument or explanation.

"How far did you mean me to come, then?" say I, half ashamed of my humors, but still with an after-thought of pettishness in my voice. "Escort you to the hall-door, I suppose, and kick my heels among the laurestines until such time as all Mr. Huntley's bills are paid?"

He turns away.

"It is of no consequence," he says, with a slight shade of impatience, and a stronger shade of disappointment in his voice. "I see that you do not wish it, but what I meant was, that you might have walked with me as far as the gate, so that on this first day we might lose as little of each other's society as possible."

"And so I will!" cry I, impulsively, with a rush of tardy repentance. "I—I—*meant* to come all along. I was only—only—*joking!*"

But to both of us it seems but a sorry jest. We set forth, and walk side by side through the park. Both of us are rather silent. Yes, though we have eight months' arrears of talk

to make up, though it seemed to me before he came that in a whole long life there would scarce be time for all the things I had to say to him, yet, now that we are reunited, we are stalking dumbly along through the withered white grass, pallid from the winter storms. Certainly, we neither of us could say any thing so well worth hearing as what the lark, in his most loud and godly joy, is telling us from on high. Perhaps it is the knowledge of this that ties our tongues.

The sun shines on our heads. He has not much power yet, but great good-will. And the air is almost as gentle as June. We have left our own domain behind us, and have reached Mrs. Huntley's white gate. Through the bars I see the sheltered laurestines all ablow.

"May I wait for you here?" say I, with diffident urgency, reflecting hopefully, as I make the suggestion, on the wholesome effect, on the length of the interview that the knowledge of my being, flattening my nose against the bars of the gate all through it, must necessarily have.

Again he looks down, as if unwilling to meet my appealing eyes.

"I think not, Nancy," he answers, reluctantly. "You see, I cannot possibly tell how long I might be obliged to keep you waiting."

"I do not mind waiting at all," persist I, eagerly. "I am not very impatient; I shall not expect you to be very quick, and" (going on very fast, to hinder him from the second refusal which I see hovering on his lips), "and it is not at all cold; just now you yourself said that you had felt many a chillier May-day, and I am so warmly wrapped up, pet!" (taking hold of one of his fingers, and making it softly travel up and down the fur of my thick coat).

He shakes his head, with a gesture, unwilling yet decided.

"No, Nancy, it could not be! I had rather that you would go home."

"I have no doubt you would!" say I, turning sharply and huffily away; then, with a sudden recollecting and repenting myself, "May I come back, then?" I say, meekly. "Come and fetch you, I mean, after a time—any long time that you like!"

"*Will* you?" he cries, with animation, the look of unwilling refusal vanishing from his face. "Would you *like?* would not it be too much trouble?"

"Not at all! not at all!" reply I, affably. "How soon, then?" (taking out my watch); "in half an hour?"

Again his face falls a little.

"I think it must be longer than *that*, Nancy."

"An hour, then?" say I, lifting a lengthened countenance wistfully to his; "people may do a good deal in an hour, may not they?"

"Had not we better be on the safe side, and say an hour and a half?" suggests he, but somewhat apprehensively—or I imagine so. "I shall be sure not to keep you a minute then—I do not relish the notion of my wife's tramping up and down this muddy road all by herself."

"And I do not relish the notion of my husband—" return I, beginning to speak very fast, and then suddenly breaking off—"Well, good-by!"

"Say, good-by, Roger," cries he, catching my hand in detention, as I turn away. "Nancy, if you knew how fond I have grown of my own name! In despite of Tichborne, I think it *lovely*."

I laugh.

"Good-by, *Roger!*"

He has opened the gate, and turned in. I watch him, as he walks with long, quick steps, up the little trim swept drive. As I follow him with my eyes, a devil enters into me. I cry:

"Roger!"

He turns at once.

"Ask her to show you Algy's bracelet," I say, with an awkward laugh; and then, thoroughly afraid of the effect of my bombshell, and not daring to see what sort it is, I turn and run quickly away.

The end of the hour and a half finds me punctually peering through the bars again. Well, I am first at the rendezvous. This, perhaps, is not very surprising, as I have not given him one moment's law. For the first five minutes, I am very fairly happy and content. The lark is still fluttering in strong rapture up in the heights of the sky; and for these five minutes I listen to him, soothed and hallowed. But after they are past, it is different. God's bird may be silent, as far as I am

concerned; not a verse more of his clear psalm do I hear. An uneasy devil of jealousy has entered into me, and stopped my ears. I take hold of the bars of the gate, and peer through, as far as my head will go; then I open it, and, stealing on tiptoe up the drive a little way, to the first corner, look warily round it. Not a sign of him! Not a sound! Not even a whisper of air to rustle the glistening laurel-leaves, or stir the flat laurestine-sprays.

I return to the road, and inculcate patience on myself. Why may not I take a lesson in easy-mindedness from Vick? Was not it Hartley Coleridge who suggested that perhaps dogs have a language of smell; and that what to us is a noisome smell, is to them a beautiful poem? If so, Vick is searching for lyrics and epics in the ditch. I stroll along the wintry brown hedge-row, and begin to pick Roger a little, scant nosegay. He shall see how patient I am! how *un*sulky! with what sunny mildness I can wait his leisure! I have already two or three snow-drops in my breast, that I picked as I came through the garden. To these I add a drooping hazel-tassel or two, and a little bit of honeysuckle-leaf, just breaking greenly into life. This is all I can find—all the scentless first-fruits of the baby year.

It is ten minutes past the due time now. Again I listen intently, as I listened yesterday, for his coming. There is a sound now; but, alas! not the right one! It is the rumbling of an approaching carriage. A pony-chaise bowls past. The occupants are acquaintances of mine, and we bow and smile to each other. As long as they are in sight, I affect to be diligently botanizing in the hedge. When they have disappeared, I sit down on a heap of stones, and take out my watch for the hundredth time; a whole quarter of an hour!

"He does not relish the notion of his wife's tramping up and down this muddy road by herself, does not he?" say I, speaking out loud, and gnashing my teeth.

Then I hurl my little posy away from me into the mud, as far as it will go. What has become of my patience? my sunny mildness? Then, as the recollection of the velvet-gown and mob-cap episode recurs to me, I repent me, and, crossing the road, pick up again my harmless catkins and snow-drops, and rearrange them. I have hardly finished wiping the mire from the tender, lilac-veined snow-drop petals, before I hear his voice in the distance, in conversation with some one. Clearly, Delilah is coming to see the last of him! I suspect that she mostly escorts them to the gate. In my present frame of mind, it would be physically impossible for me to salute her with the bland civility which society enjoins on people of our stage of civilization. I therefore remain sitting on my heap.

Presently, Roger emerges alone. He does not see me at first, but looks up the road, and down the road, in search of me. When, at last, he perceives me, no smile—(as has ever hitherto been his wont)—kindles his eyes and lips. With unstirred gravity, he approaches me.

"Here you are *at last!*" cry I, scampering to meet him, but with a stress, from which human nature is unable to refrain, on the last two words.

"At last?" he repeats in a tone of surprise; "am I over time?—Yes"—(looking at his watch)—"so I am! I had no idea of it; I hope you have not been long waiting."

"*I* was here to the minute," reply I, curtly; and again my tongue declines to refrain from accentuation.

"I beg your pardon!" he says, still speaking with unnecessary seriousness, as it seems to me, "I really had no idea of it."

"I dare say not," say I, with a little wintry grin; "I never heard that they had a clock in paradise."

"*In paradise!*" he repeats, looking at me strangely with his keen, clear eyes, that seem to me to have less of a caress in them than they ever had before on meeting mine. "What has *paradise* to say to it? Do you imagine that I have been in *paradise* since I left you here?"

"I do not know, I am sure!" reply I, rather confused, and childishly stirring the stiff red mud with the end of my boot, "I believe *they* mostly do; Algy does—" then afraid of drawing down the vial of his wrath on me a second time for my scandal-mongering propensities, I go on quickly: "Were you talking to yourself as you came down the drive? I heard your voice as if in conversation. I sometimes talk to myself when I am by myself, quite loud."

"Do you? I do not think I do; at least

I am not aware of it; I was talking to Zéphine."

"Why did not she come to the gate, then?" inquire I, tartly; "did she know I was there? did not she want to see me?"

"I do not know; I did not ask her."

I look up at him in strong surprise. We are in the park now—our own unpeopled, silent park, where none but the deer can see us; and yet he has not offered me the smallest caress; not once has he called me "Nancy;" he, to whom hitherto my homely name has appeared so sweet. It is only an hour and three-quarters since I parted from him, and yet in that short space an indisputable shade, a change that exists not only in my imagination, but one that no most careless, superficial eye could avoid seeing—has come over him. Face, manner, even gait, are all altered. I think of Algy—Algy as he used to be, our jovial pet and playfellow, Algy as he now is, soured, sulky, unloving, his very beauty dimmed by discontent and passion. Is this the beginning of a like change in Roger?

A spasm of jealous agony, of angry despair, contracts my heart as I think this.

"Well, are all Mr. Huntley's debts paid?" I ask, trying to speak in a tone of sprightly ease; "is there a good hope of his coming back soon?"

"Not yet awhile; in time, perhaps, he may."

Still there is not a vestige of a smile on his face. He does not look at me as he speaks; his eyes are on the long, dead knots of the colorless grass at his feet; in his expression despondency and preoccupation strive for supremacy.

"Have you made your head ache?" I say, gently stealing my hand into his; "there is nothing that addles the brains like muddling over accounts, is there?"

Am I awake? *Can* I believe it? He has dropped my hand, as if he disliked the touch of it.

"No, thanks, no. I have no headache," he answers hastily.

Another little silence. We are marching quickly along, as if our great object were to get our *tête-à-tête* over. As we came, we dawdled, stood still to listen to the lark, to look at the wool-soft cloud-heaps piled in the west—on any trivial excuse indeed; but now all these things are changed.

"Did you talk of business *all* the time?" I ask, by-and-by, with timid curiosity.

It is *not* my fancy; he does plainly hesitate.

"Not quite *all*," he answers, in a low voice, and still looking away from me.

"About *what*, then?" I persist, in a voice through whose counterfeit playfulness I myself too plainly hear the unconquerable tremulousness; "may not I hear?—or is it a secret?

He does not answer; it seems to me that he is considering what response to make.

"Perhaps," say I, still with a poor assumption of lightness and gayety, "perhaps you were talking of—of old times."

He laughs a little, but *whose* laugh has he borrowed? in that dry, harsh tone there is nothing of my Roger's mellow mirth!

"Not we; old times must take care of themselves; one has enough to do with the new ones, I find."

"Did she—did she say any thing to you about—about *Algy*, then?"—hesitatingly.

"We did not mention his name."

There is something so abrupt and trenchant in his tone that I have not the spirit to pursue my inquiries any further. In deep astonishment and still deeper mortification, I pursue my way in silence.

Suddenly Roger comes to a stand-still.

"Nancy!" he says, in a voice that is more like his own, stopping and laying his hands on my shoulders; while in his eyes is something of his old kindness; yet not quite the old kindness either; there is more of unwilling, rueful yearning in them than there ever was in that—"Nancy, how old are you?—nineteen is it not?"

"Very nearly twenty," reply I, cheerfully, for he has called me "Nancy," and I hail it as a sign of returning fine weather; "we may call it twenty; will not it be a comfort when I am well out of my teens?"

"And I am forty-eight," he says, as if speaking more to himself than to me, and sighing heavily; "it is a *monstrous*, an *unnatural* disparity!"

"It is not nearly so bad as if it were *the other way*," reply I, laughing gayly; "I forty-eight, and *you* twenty, is it?"

"My child! my child!"—speaking with an accent of, to me, unaccountable suffering

—"what possessed me to *marry* you? why did not I *adopt* you instead? It would have been a hundred times more seemly!"

"It is a little late to think of that now, is not it?" I say, with an uncomfortable smile; then I go on, with an uneasy laugh, "that was the very idea that occurred to us the first night you arrived; at least, it never struck us as possible that you would take any notice of *me*, but we all said what a good thing it would be for the family if you would adopt Barbara or the Brat."

"Did you?" (very quickly, in a tone of keen pain); "it struck you all in the same light, then?"

"But that was before we had seen you," I answer, hastily, repenting my confession as soon as I see its effects. "When we *had*, we soon changed our tune."

"*If* I *had* adopted you," he pursues, still looking at me with the same painful and intent wistfulness, "if I had been your father, you would have been fond of me, would not you? Not *afraid* of me—not afraid to tell me any thing that most dearly concerned you—you would perhaps"—(with a difficult smile)—"you would perhaps have made me your *confidant*, would you, Nancy?"

I look up at him in utter bewilderment.

"What are you talking about? Why do I want a confidant? What have I to confide? What have I to tell any one?"

Our eyes are resting on each other, and, as I speak, I feel his go with clean and piercing search right through mine into my soul. In a moment I think of Musgrave, and the untold black tale now forever in my thought attached to him, and, as I so think, the hot flush of agonized shame that the recollection of him never fails to call to my face, invades cheeks, brow, and throat. To hide it, I drop my head on Roger's breast. Shall I tell him *now*, this instant? Is it possible that he has already some faint and shadowy suspicion of the truth—some vague conjecture concerning it, as something in his manner seems to say? But no! it is absolutely impossible! Who, with the best will in the world, could have told him? Is not the tale safely buried in the deep grave of Musgrave's and my two hearts?

I raise my head, and twice essay to speak. Twice I stop, choked. How can I put into words the insult I have received? How can I reveal to him the slack levity, the careless looseness, with which I have kept the honor confided to me?

As my eyes stray helplessly round in a vain search for advice or help from the infinite unfeeling apathy of Nature, I catch sight of the distant chimneys of the abbey! How near it is! After all, why should I sow dissension between such close neighbors? why make an irreparable breach between two families, hitherto united by the kindly ties of mutual friendship and good-will?

Frank is young, very young; he has been—so Roger himself told me—very ill brought up. Perhaps he has already repented, who knows? I try to persuade myself that these are the reasons—and sufficient reasons—of my silence, and I take my resolution afresh. I will be dumb. The flush slowly dies out of my face, and, when I think it is almost gone, I venture to look again at Roger. I think that his eyes have never left me. They seem to be expecting me to speak, but, as I still remain silent, he turns at length away, and also gently removes his hands from my shoulders. We stand apart.

"Well, Nancy," he says, sighing again, as if from the bottom of his soul, "my poor child, it is no use talking about it. I can never be your father now."

"And a very good thing too!" rejoin I, with a dogged stoutness. "I do not see what I want with *two* fathers; I have always found *one* amply enough—quite as much as I could manage, in fact."

He seems hardly to be listening to me. He has dropped his eyes on the ground, and is speaking more to himself than to me.

"Husband and wife we are!" he says, with a slow depression of tone, "and, as long as God's and man's laws stand, husband and wife we must remain!"

"You are not very polite," I cry, with an indignant lump rising in my throat; "you speak as if you were *sorry* for it—*are* you?"

He lifts his eyes again, and again their keen search investigates the depths of my soul; but no human eye can rightly read the secrets of any other human spirit; they find what they expect to find, not what is there. Clear and cuttingly keen as they are, Roger's eyes do not read my soul aright.

"Are *you*, Nancy?"

"If *you* are, I am," I reply, with a half-smothered sob.

He makes no rejoinder, and we begin again to walk along homeward, but slowly this time.

"We have made a mistake, perhaps," he says, presently, still speaking with the same slow and ruminating sadness in his tone. "The inscrutable God alone knows why He permits his creatures to mar all their seventy years by one short false step—yes, a *mistake!*"

(Ah me! ah me! I always mistrusted those laurestines! They sent me back my brother churlish and embittered, but oh! that in my steadfast Roger they should have worked such a sudden deadly change!)

"Is it more a mistake," I cry, bursting out into irrepressible anger, "than it was two hours ago, when I left you at that gate? You did not seem to think it a mistake *then*—at least you hid it very well if you did"—(then going on quickly, seeing that he is about to interrupt me)—"have you been *comparing notes*, pray?" Has *she* found it a mistake, too?"

"Yes, *that* she has! Poor soul! God help her!" he answers, compassionately.

Something in the pity of his tone jars frightfully on my strung nerves.

"If God has to help all the poor souls who have made mistakes, He will have his hands full!" I retort, bitterly.

Another silence. We are drawing near the pleasure-grounds—the great rhododendron belt that shelters the shrubbery from the east wind.

"Nancy," says Roger, again stopping, and facing me too. This time he does not put his hands on my shoulders; the melancholy is still in his eyes, but there is no longer any harshness. They repossess their natural kindly benignity. "Though it is perhaps impossible that there should be between us that passionate love that there might be between people that are nearer each other in age—more fitly mated—yet there is no reason why we should not *like* each other very heartily, is there, dear? why there should not be between us absolute confidence, perfect frankness—that is the great thing, is not it?"

He is looking with such intense wistfulness at me, that I turn away. Why should not there be passionate love between us? Who is there but himself to hinder it? So I make no answer.

"I dare say," he says, taking my right hand, and holding it with a cool and kindly clasp, "that you think it difficult—next door to impossible—for two people, one at the outset, one almost on the confines of life, to enter very understandingly into each other's interests! No doubt the thought that I—being so much ahead of you in years"—(sighing again heavily)—"cannot see with your eyes, or look at things from your stand-point—would make it harder for you to come to me in your troubles; but indeed, dear, if you believe me, I will *try*, and, as we are to spend our lives together, I think it would be better, would not it?"

He speaks with a deprecating humility, an almost imploring gentleness, but I am so thoroughly upset by the astounding change that has come over the tone of his talk—by the clouds that have suddenly darkened the morning sunshine of my horizon—that I cannot answer him in the same tone.

"Perhaps we shall not have to spend all our lives together!" I say, with a harsh laugh. "Cheer up! One of us may *die!* who knows?"

After that we neither of us say any thing till we reach the house.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Yea, by God's rood, I trusted you too well!"

In the hall we part without a word, and I, spiritlessly, mount the staircase alone. How I flew down it this morning, three steps at a time, and had some ado to hinder myself from sliding down the banisters, as we have all often, with dangerous joy, done at home! Now I crawl up, like some sickly old person. When I reach my bedroom, I throw myself into the first chair, and lie in it—

". . . . quiet as any water-sodden log
Stayed in the wandering warble of a brook."

I do not attempt to take off my hat and jacket. Of what use is it to take them off more than to leave them on, or to leave them on more than to take them off? Of what use is *any thing*, pray? What a weary round life

is! what a silly circle of unfortunate repetitions! eating only to be hungry again; waking only to sleep; sleeping only to wake!

At first I am too inert even to think, even to lift my hand to protect my cheek from Vick's muddy paws, who, annoyed at my evident inattention to her presence, is sitting on my lap, making little impatient *clawings* at my defenseless countenance. But gradually on the river of recollection all the incidents of the morning flow through my mind. In more startling relief than ever, the astounding change in Roger, wrought by those ill-starred two hours, stands out. Is it possible that I may have been attributing it to a wrong cause? Doubtless, the first interview with the woman he had loved, and who had thrown him over (by-the-by, how forgiving men are!) —yes, the first, probably, since they had stood in the relation of betrothed people to each other—must have been full of pain. Doubtless, the contrast between the crude gawkiness of the raw girl he has drifted into marrying—for I suppose it was more accident than any thing else—with the mature and subtile grace, the fine and low-voiced sweetness of the woman whom his whole heart and soul and taste chose and approved, must have struck him with keen force. I expected *that:* it would not have taken me by surprise. If he had emerged from among the laurestines, depressed, and vainly struggling for a factitious cheerfulness, I think I could have understood it. I think I could have borne with it, could have tried meekly to steal back into his heart again, to win him back, in despite of ignorance, gawkiness, and all other my drawbacks, by force of sheer love.

But the change was surely too abrupt to be accounted for on this hypothesis. Would *Roger*, my pattern of courtesy—Roger, who shrinks from hurting the meanest beggar's feelings—would he, in such plain terms, have deplored and wished undone our marriage, if it were only suffering to *himself* that it had entailed? Has his unselfish chivalry gone the way of Algy's brotherly love? Impossible! the more I think of it, the more unlikely it seems—the more certain it appears to me that I must look elsewhere for the cause of the alteration that has so heavily darkened my day.

I have risen and am walking quickly up and down. I have shaken off my stolid apathy, or, rather, it has fallen off of itself. Can she have told him any ill tales of me? any thing to my disadvantage? Instantly the thought of Musgrave—the black and heavy thought that is never far from the portals of my mind—darts across me, and, at the same instant, like a flash of lightning, the recollection of my meeting her on the fatal evening, just as (with tear-stained, swollen face) I had parted from Frank—of the alert and lively interest in her eyes, as she bowed and smiled to me, flames with sudden illumination into my soul. Still I can hardly credit it. It would, no doubt, be pleasant to her to sow dissension between us, but would even *she* dare to carry ill tales of a wife to a husband? And even supposing that she had, would he attach so much importance to my being seen with wet cheeks? I, who cry so easily—I, who wept myself nearly blind when Jacky caught his leg in the snare? If he thinks so much of that part of the tale, *what would he think of the rest?*

As I make this reflection I shudder, and again congratulate myself on my silence. For beyond our parting, and my tears, it is *impossible* that she can have told him aught.

Men are not prone to publish their own discomfitures; even *I* know that much. I exonerate Mr. Musgrave from all share in making it known—and have the mossed tree-trunks lips? or the loud brook an articulate tongue? Thank God! thank God! *no!* Nature never blabs. With infinite composure, with a most calm smile she *listens*, but she never tells again.

A little reassured by this thought, I resolve to remain in doubt no longer than I can help, but to ascertain, if necessary, by direct inquiry, whether my suspicions are correct. This determination is no sooner come to than it puts fresh life and energy into my limbs. I take off my hat and jacket, smooth my hair, and prepare with some alacrity for luncheon.

It is evening, however, before I have an opportunity of putting my resolve in practice. At luncheon, there are the servants; all afternoon Roger is closeted with his agent: before we set off this morning, he never mentioned the agent: he never figured at all in our day's plan—(I imagined that he was to be kept till to-morrow); and at dinner there are the ser-

vants again. Thank God, they are gone now! We are alone, Roger and I. We are sitting in my boudoir, as in my day-dreams, before his return, I had pictured us; but, alas! where is the caressing proximity which figured in all my visions? where is the stool on which I was to sit at his feet, with head confidently leaned on his arm? As it happens, Vick is sitting on the stool, and we occupy two arm-chairs, at civil distance from each other, much as if we had been married sixty years, and had hated each other for fifty-nine of them. I am idly fiddle-faddling with a piece of work, and Roger—is it possible?—is stretching out his hand toward a book.

"You do not mean to say that you are going to *read?*" I say, in a tone of sharp vexation.

He lays it down again.

"If you had rather talk, I will not."

"I am afraid," say I, with a sour laugh, "that you have not kept much conversation *for home use!* I suppose you exhausted it all, this morning, at Laurel Cottage!"

He passes his hand slowly across his forehead.

"Perhaps!—I do not think I am in a very talking vein."

"By-the-by," say I, my heart beating thick, and with a hurry and tremor in my voice, as I approach the desired yet dreaded theme, "you have never told me what it was, besides Mr. Huntley's debts, that you talked of this morning!—you owned that you did not talk of business *quite* all the time."

"Did I?"

He has forgotten his book now; across the flame of the candles, he is looking full and steadily at me.

"When I asked you, you said it was not about old times?—of course—" (laughing acridly)—"I can imagine your becoming illimitably diffuse about *them*, but you told me, that, 'No,' you did mention them."

"I told truth."

"You also said," continue I, with my voice still trembling, and my pulses throbbing, "that it was not *Algy* that you were discussing!—if *I* had been in your place, I could, perhaps, have found a good deal to say about *him;* but you told me that you never mentioned him."

"We did not."

"Then what *did* you talk about?" I ask, in strong excitement; "it must have been a very odd theme that you find such difficulty in repeating."

Still he is looking, with searching gravity, full in my face.

"Do you *really* wish to know?"

I cannot meet his eyes: something in me makes me quail before them. I turn mine away, but answer, stoutly:

"Yes, I *do* wish. Why should I have asked, if I did not?"

Still he says nothing: still I feel, though I am not looking at him, that his eyes are upon me.

"Was it"—say I, unable any longer to bear that dumb gaze, and preferring to take the bull by the horns, and rush on my fate—"was it any thing about *me?* has she been telling you any tales of—of—*me?*"

No answer! No sound but the clock, and Vick's heavy breathing, as she peacefully snores on the footstool. I *cannot* bear the suspense. Again I lift my eyes, and look at him. Yes, I am right! the intense anxiety—the overpowering emotion on his face tell me that I have touched the right string.

"Are there—are there—are you aware that there any tales that she *could* tell of you?"

Again I laugh harshly.

"Ha! ha! if we came to mutual anecdotes, I am not quite sure that I might not have the best of it!"

"That is not the question," he replies, in a voice so exceedingly stern, so absolutely different from any thing I have hitherto contemplated as possible in my gentle, genial Roger, that, again, to the depths of my soul, I quail; how could I ever, in wildest dreams, have thought I should dare to tell him?—"it is nothing to me what tales *you* can tell of *her!*—*she* is not my wife!—what I wish to know—what I *will* know, is, whether there is any thing that she *could* say of you!"

For a moment, I do not answer. I cannot. A coward fear is grasping my heart with its clammy hands. Then—

"*Could!*" say I, shrugging my shoulders, and feebly trying to laugh derisively; "of course she could! it would be difficult to set a limit to the powers of a lady of her imagination!"

"What do you mean?" he cries, quickly, and with what sounds like a sort of hope in his voice; "have you any reason—any grounds for thinking her inventive?"

I do not answer directly.

"It is true, then," I cry, with flashing eyes, and in a voice of great and indignant anguish. "I have not been mistaken! I was right! Is it possible that *you*, who, only this morning, warned me with such severity against backbiting, have been calmly listening to scandalous tales about me from a stranger?"

He does not interrupt me: he is listening eagerly, and that sort of hope is still in his face.

"I *knew* it would come, sooner or later," I continue, speaking excitedly, and with intense bitterness, "sooner or later, I knew that it would be a case of Algy over again! but I did not—did not think that it would have been quite so soon! Great Heaven!" (smiting my hands sharply together, and looking upward), "I *have* fallen low! to think that I should come to be discussed by *you* with *her!*"

"I have *not* discussed you with her," he answers, very solemnly, and still looking at me with that profound and greedy eagerness in his eyes; "with *no* living soul would I discuss my wife—I should have hardly thought I need tell you that! What I heard, I heard by accident. She—as I believe, in all innocence of heart—referred to — the — the — circumstance, taking it for granted that I knew it—that *you* had told me of it, and I—*I*—" (raising his clinched right hand to emphasize his speech)—"I take God to witness, I had no more idea to what she was alluding—as soon as I understood—she must have thought me very dull—" (laughing hoarsely)—"for it was a long time before I took it in—but as soon as I understood to what manner of anecdote it was that she was referring—then, *at once*, I bade her be silent!—not even with *her*, would I talk over my wife!"

He stops. He has risen from his chair, and is now standing before me. His breath comes quick and panting; and his face is not far from being as white as mine.

"But what I have learned," he continues presently, in a low voice, that, by a great effort, he succeeds in making calm and steady, "I cannot again unlearn! I would not if I could!—I have no desire to live in a fool's paradise! I tried hard this morning—God knows what constraint I had to put upon myself—to induce you to tell me of your own accord—to *volunteer* it—but you would not—you were *resolutely* silent. Why were you? Why were you?" (breaking off with an uncontrollable emotion). "I should not have been hard upon you—I should have made allowances. God knows we all need it!"

I sit listening in a stony silence; every bit of me seems turned into cold rock.

"But *now*," he says, regathering his composure, and speaking with a resolute, stern quiet, "I have no other resource—you have left me none—but to come to you, and ask point-blank, is this true, or is it false?"

For a moment my throat seems absolutely stopped up, choked; there seems no passage for my voice, through its dry, parched gates. Then at length I speak faintly: "Is *what* true? is what false? I suppose you will not expect me to deny it, before I know what it is?"

He does not at once answer. He takes a turn once or twice up and down the silent room, in strong endeavor to overcome and keep down his agitation, then he returns and speaks; with a face paler, indeed, than I could have imagined any thing so bronzed could be; graver, more austere than I ever thought I should see it, but still without bluster or hectoring violence.

"It is true, then?" he says, speaking in a very low key. "Great God! that I should have to put such a question to my wife; that one evening, about a week ago, on the very day, indeed, that the news of my intended return arrived, you were seen parting with—with —*Musgrave*" (he seems to have an intense difficulty in pronouncing the name) "at or after nightfall, on the edge of Brindley Wood, *he* in a state of the most evident and extreme agitation, and *you* in floods of tears!—is it true, or is it false?—for God's sake, speak quickly!"

But I cannot comply with his request. I am *gasping*. His eyes are upon me, and, at every second's delay, they gather additional sternness. Oh, how awful they are in their just wrath! When was father, in his worst and most thunderous storms, half so dreadful? half so awe-inspiring?

"What sort of an interview could it have

been to which there was such a close?" he says, as if making the reflection more to himself than to me; "speak! is it true?"

I can no longer defer my answer. One thing or another I must say: both eyes and lips imperatively demand it. Twice, nay *thrice* I struggle—struggle mightily to speak, and speak well and truly, and twice, nay, three times, that base fear strangles my words. Then, at length—O friends! do not be any harder upon me than you can help, for indeed, *indeed* I have paid sorely for it, and it is the first lie that ever I told; then, at length, with a face as wan as the ashes of a dead fire—with trembling lips, and a faint, scarcely audible voice, I say, "No, it is not true!"

"*Not true?*" he echoes, catching up my words quickly: but in his voice is none of the relief, the restored amenity that I had looked for, and for the hope of which I have perjured myself; equally in voice and face, there is only a deep and astonished anger—"*not true!*—you mean to say that it is *false!*"

"Yes, false!" I repeat in a sickly whisper. Oh, why, if I *must* lie, do not I do it with a bold and voluble assurance? whom would my starved, pinched falsehood deceive?

"You mean to say," speaking with irrepressible excitement, while the wrathful light gathers and grows intenser in the gray depths of his eyes, "that this—this *interview* never took place? that it is all a delusion; a mistake?"

"Yes."

I repeat it mechanically now. Having gone thus far, I must go on, but I feel giddy and sick, and my hands grasp the arms of my chair. I feel as if I should fall out of it if they did not.

"You are *sure?*" speaking with a heavy emphasis, and looking persistently at me, while the anger of his eyes is dashed and crossed by a miserable entreaty. Ah! if they had had that look at first, I could have told him. "Are you *sure?*" he repeats, and I, driven by the fates to my destruction, while God hides his face from me, and the devil pushes me on, answer hazily, "Yes, quite sure!"

Then he asks me no more questions; he turns and slowly leaves the room, and I know that I have lied in vain!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

And thus I, ingenious architect of my own ruin, build up the barrier of a lie between myself and Roger. It is a barrier that hourly grows higher, more impassable. As the days go by, I say to myself in heart-sickness, that I shall never now cross it—never see it leveled with the earth. Even when we too are dead it will still rise between us in the other world; if—as all the nations have agreed to say—there *be* another. For my part, I think at this time that, if there is any chance of its bearing aught of resemblance to this present world, I had far fainer there were none.

With all due deference to Shakespeare—and I suppose that even the one supreme genius of all time must, in his day, have made a mistake or two—I have but faint belief in the "sweet uses of adversity." I think that they are about as mythical as the jewels in the toad's ugly skull, to which he likened them. It is in *prosperity* that one looks up, with leaping heart and clear eyes, and through the clouds sees God sitting throned in light. In adversity one sees nothing but one's own dunghill and boils.

At least such has been my experience. I think I could have borne it better if I had not looked forward to his return so much—if he had been an austere and bitter tyrant, to *whose coming* I had looked with dread, I could have braced my nerves and pulled myself together, to face with some stoutness the hourly trials of life. But when one has counted the days, hours, and moments, till some high festival, and, when it comes, it turns out a drear, black funeral, one cannot meet the changed circumstances with any great fortitude.

It is the horrible contrast between my dreams and their realization that gives the keenest poignancy to my pangs.

To his return I had referred the smoothing of all my difficulties, the clearing up of all my doubts, the sweeping of all clouds from my sky; and now he is back! and, oh, how far, *far* gloomier than ever is my weather! What a sullen leaden sky overhangs me!

I never tell him about Algy after all! I do not often laugh now; but I *did* laugh loudly and long the other day, although I was quite alone, when I thought of my wily pur-

pose of setting Roger on his guard against Mrs. Huntley's little sugared unveracities.

No, I never tell him about Algy! Why should I? it would be wasted breath—spent words. He would not believe me. In the more important case has he not taken her word in preference to mine? Would he not in *this* too? For I know that he knows, as well as I know it myself, that in that matter I lied.

Sometimes, when I am by myself, a mighty yearning—a most constraining longing seizes me to go to him—fall at his feet, and tell him the truth even yet. After all, God knows that I have no ugly fault to confess to him—no infidelity even of thought. But as soon as I am in his presence the desire fades; or at least the power to put it in practice melts away. For he never gives me an opening. After that first evening never does he draw nigh the subject: never once is the detested name of Musgrave mentioned between us. If he had been one most dear to us both and had died untimely, we could not avoid with more sacred care any allusion to him. And, even if, by doing infinite violence to myself, I could bring myself to overcome the painful steepness of the hill of difficulty that lies between me and the subject, and tell the tardy truth, to what use, pray? Having once owned that I had lied, could I resent any statement of mine being taken with distrust? Would he believe me? Not he! He would say, "If you were as innocent as you say, why did you *lie?* If you were innocent, what had you to fear?" So I hold my peace. And, as the days go, and the winter wanes, it seems to me that I can plainly see, with no uncertain or doubtful eyes, Roger's love wane too.

After all, why should I wonder? I may be sorry, for who ever saw gladly love—the one all-good thing on this earth, most of whose good things are adulterated and dirt-smirched—who ever saw it *gladly* slip away from them? But I cannot be surprised.

With Roger, love and trust must ever go hand-in-hand; and, when the one has gone, the other must needs soon follow.

After all, what he loved in me was a delusion—had never existed. It was my blunt honesty, my transparent candor, the open-hearted downrightness that in me amounted to a misfortune, that had at first attracted him. And now that he has found that the unpolished abruptness of my manners can conceal as great an amount of deception as the most insinuating silkiness of any one else's, I do not see what there is left in me to attract him. Certainly I have no beauty to excite a man's passions, nor any genius to enchain his intellect, nor even any pretty accomplishment to amuse his leisure.

Why *should* he love me? Because I am his wife? Nay, nay! who ever loved because it was their duty? who ever succeeded in putting love in harness, and *driving* him? Sooner than be the object of such up-hill conscientious affection, I had far rather be treated with cold indifference—active hatred even. Because I am young? That seems no recommendation in his eyes! Because I love him? He does not believe it. Once or twice I have tried to tell him so, and he has gently pooh-poohed me.

Sometimes it has occurred to me that, perhaps, if I had him all to myself, I might even yet bring him back to me—might reconcile him to my paucity of attractions, and persuade him of my honesty; but what chance have I, when every day, every hour of the day if he likes to put himself to such frequent pain, he may see and bitterly note the contrast between the woman of his choice and the woman of his fate—the woman from whom he is irrevocably parted, and the woman to whom he is as irrevocably joined. And I think that hardly a day passes that he does not give himself the opportunity of instituting the comparison.

Not that he is unkind to me; do not think that. It would be impossible for Roger to be unkind to any thing, much more to any weakly woman thing that is quite in his own power. No, no! there is no fear of that. I have no need to be a grizzle. I have no cross words, no petulances, no neglects even, to bear. But oh! in all his friendly words, in all his kindly, considerate actions, what a *chill* there is! It is as if some one that had been a day dead laid his hand on my heart!

How many, *many* miles farther apart we are now, than we were when I was here, and he in Antigua; albeit then the noisy winds roared and sung, and the brown billows tumbled between us! If he would but *hit* me, or box my ears, as Bobby has so often done—a good

swinging, tingling box, that made one see stars, and incarnadized all one side of one's countenance—oh, how much, *much* less would it hurt than do the frosty chillness of his smiles, the uncaressing touch of his cool hands!

I have plenty of time to think these thoughts, for I am a great deal alone now. Roger is out all day, hunting or with his agent, or on some of the manifold business that landed property entails, or that the settlement of Mr. Huntley's inextricably tangled affairs involves. Very often he does not come in till dressing-time. I never ask him where he has been—never! I think that I know.

Often in these after-days, pondering on those ill times, seeing their incidents in that duer proportion that a stand-point at a little distance from them gives, it has occurred to me that sometimes I was wrong, that not seldom, while I was eating my heart out upstairs, with dumb jealousy picturing to myself my husband in the shaded fragrance, the dulcet gloom of the drawing-room at Laurel Cottage, he was in the house with me, as much alone as I, in the dull solitude of his own room, pacing up and down the carpet, or bending over an unread book.

I will tell you why I think so. One day—it is the end of March now, the year is no longer a swaddled baby, it is shooting up into a tall stripling—I have been straying about the brown gardens, *alone*, of course. It is a year to-day since Bobby and I together strolled among the kitchen-stuff in the garden at home, since he served me that ill turn with the ladder. Every thing reminds me of that day: these might be the same crocus-clumps, as those that last year frightened away winter with their purple and gold banners. I remember that, as I looked down their deep throats, I was humming Tou Tou's verb, "J'aime, I love; Tu aimes, Thou lovest; Il aime, He loves."

I sigh. There was the same purple promise over the budded woods; the same sharpness in the bustling wind. Since then, Nature has gone through all her plodding processes, and now it is all to do over again. A sense of fatigue at the infinite repetitions of life comes over me. If Nature would but make a little variation! If the seasons would but change their places a little, and the flowers their order, so that there might be something of unexpectedness about them! But no! they walk round and round forever in their monotonous leisure.

I am stooping to pick a little posy of violets as these languid thoughts dawdle through my mind—blue mysteries of sweetness and color, born of the unscented, dull earth. As I pass Roger's door, having reëntered the house, the thought strikes me to set them on his writing-table. Most likely he will not notice them, not be aware of them: but even so they will be able humbly to speak to him the sweet things that he will not listen to from me. I open the door, and listlessly enter. If I had thought there was any chance of his being within, I should not have done so without knocking; indeed, I hardly think I should have done it at all, but this seems to me most unlikely. Nevertheless, he is.

As I enter, I catch sudden sight of him. He is sitting in his arm-chair, his elbows leaned on the table before him, his hand passed through his ruffled hair, and his gray eyes straying abstractedly away from the neglected page before him. I see him before he sees me. I have time to take in all the dejection of his attitude, all its spiritless idleness. At the slight noise my skirts make, he looks up. I stop on the threshold.

"I—I thought you were out," say I, hesitatingly, and reddening a little, as if I were being caught in the commission of some little private sin.

"No, I came in an hour ago."

"I beg your pardon," I say, humbly; "I will not disturb you; I would have knocked if I had known!"

He has risen, and is coming toward me.

"Knock! why, in Heaven's name, *should* you knock?" he says, with something of his old animation; then, suddenly changing his tone to one of courteous, friendly coldness, "Why do you stand out there? will you not come in?"

I comply with this invitation, and, entering, sit down in another arm-chair not far from Roger's, but, now that I am here, I do not seem to have much to say.

"You have been in the gardens?" he says, presently, glancing at my little nosegay, and speaking more to hinder total silence from reigning, than for any other reason.

"Yes," I reply, trying to be cheerful and chatty, "I have been picking *these;* the Czar have not half their perfume, though they are three times their size! *these* smell so good!"

As I speak, I timidly half stretch out the little bunch to him, that he, too, may inhale their odor, but the gesture is so uncertain and faint that he does not perceive it—at least he takes no notice of it, and I am sure that if he had he would; but yet I am so discouraged by the failure of my little overture that I have not resolution enough to tell him that I had gathered them for him. Instead, I snubbedly and discomfortedly put them in my own breast.

Presently I speak again.

"Do you remember," I say—"no, I dare say you do not, but yet it is so—it is a year to-day since you found me sitting on the top of the wall!—such a situation for a person of nineteen to be discovered in!"

At the recollection I laugh a little, and not bitterly, which is what I do not often do now. I can only see his profile, but it seems to me that a faint smile is drawing on his face, too.

"It was a good jump, was not it?" I go on, laughing again; "I still wonder that I did not knock you down."

He is certainly smiling now; his face has almost its old, tender mirth.

"It will be a year to-morrow," continue I emboldened by perceiving this, and beginning to count on my fingers, "since Toothless Jack and the curates came to dine, and you staid so long in the dining-room that I fell asleep; the day after to-morrow, it will be a year since we walked by the river-side, and saw the goslings flowering out on the willows; the day after that it will be a year since—"

"Stop!" he cries, interrupting me, with a voice and face equally full of disquiet and pain; "do not go on, where is the use?—I hate anniversaries."

I stop, quenched into silence; my poor little trickle of talk effectually dried. After a pause, he speaks.

"What has made you think of all these dead trivialities?" he asks in a voice more moved—or I think so—less positively steady, than his has been of late; "at your age, it is more natural to look on than to look back."

"Is it?" say I, sadly, "I do not know; I seem to have a great deal of time for *thinking* now; this house is so *extraordinarily* silent! did you never notice it?—of course it is large, and we are only two people in it, but at home it never seemed to me so *deadly* quiet, even when I was alone in the house."

"*Were* you ever alone?" he asks, with a smile. He is thinking of the noisy multitude that are connected in his memory with my father's mansion, that, during all his experience of it, have filled its rooms and passages with the hubbub of their strong-lunged jollity.

"Yes, I have been," I reply; "not often, of course! but several times, when the boys were away, and father and mother and Barbara had gone out to dinner: of course it seemed still and dumb, but not—" (shuddering a little)—"not so *aggressively, loudly* silent as this does!"

He looks at me, with a sort of remorseful pain.

"It *is* very dull for you!" he says, compassionately; "shut up in endless duet, with a person treble your age! I ought to have thought of that; in a month or so, we shall be going to London, *that* will amuse you, will not it? and till then, is there any one that you would like to have asked here?—any friend of your own?—any companion of your own age?"

"No," reply I, despondently, staring out of the window, "I have no friends."

"The boys, then?" speaking with a sudden assurance of tone, as one that has certainly hit upon a pleasant suggestion.

I shake my head.

"I could not have Bobby and the Brat, if I would, and I would not have Algy if I could!" I reply with curt dejection.

"Barbara, then?"

Again I shake my head. Not even Barbara will I allow to witness the failure of my dreams, the downfall of my high castles, the sterility of my Promised Land.

"No, I will not have Barbara!" I answer; "last time that she was here—" but I cannot finish my sentence. I break away weeping.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"I think you hardly know the tender rhyme
Of 'Trust me not at all or all in all!'"

THERE are some wounds, O my friends, that Time, by himself, with no clever physician to help him, will surely cure. You all know that, do not you? some wounds that he will lay his cool ointment on, and by-and-by they are well. Among such, are the departures hence of those we have strongly loved, and to whom we have always been, as much as in us lay, tender and good. But there are others that he only worsens—yawning gaps that he but widens; as if one were to put one's fingers in a great rent, and tear it asunder. And of these last is mine.

As the year grows apace, as the evenings draw themselves out, and the sun every day puts on fresh strength, we seem to grow ever more certainly apart. Our bodies, indeed, are nigh each other, but our souls are sundered. It never seems to strike any one, it is true, that we are not a happy couple; indeed, it would be very absurd if it did. We never wrangle—we never contradict each other—we have no tiffs; but we are *two* and not *one*. Whatever may be the cause, whether it be due to his shaken confidence in me, or (I myself assign this latter as its chief reason) to the constant neighborhood of the woman whom I know him to have loved and coveted years before he ever saw me; whatever may be the cause, the fact remains; I no longer please him. It does not surprise me much. After all, the boys always told me that men would not care about me; that I was not the sort of woman to get on with them! Well, perhaps! It certainly seems so.

I meet Mrs. Huntley pretty often in society nowadays, at such staid and sober dinners as the neighborhood thinks fit to indulge in, in this lenten season; and, whenever I do so, I cannot refrain from a stealthy and wistful observation of her.

She is ten—twelve years older than I. Between her and me lie the ten years best worth living of a woman's life; and yet, how easily she distances me! With no straining, with no hard-breathed effort, she canters lightly past me. So I think, as I intently and curiously watch her—watch her graceful, languid silence with women, her pretty, lady-like playfulness with men. And how successful she is with them! how highly they relish her! While I, in the uselessness of my round, white youth, sit benched among the old women, dropping spiritless, pointless "yeses" and "noes" among the veteran worldliness of their talk, how they crowd about her, like swarmed bees on some honeyed, spring day! how they scowl at each other! and *finesse* as to who shall approach most nearly to her cloudy skirts!

Several times I have strained my ears to catch what are the utterances that make them laugh so much, make them look both so fluttered and so smoothed. Each time that I succeed, I am disappointed. There is no touch of genius, no salt of wit in any thing she says. Her utterances are hardly more brilliant than my own.

You will despise me, I think, friends, when I tell you that, in these days, I made one or two pitiful little efforts to imitate her, to copy, distantly and humbly, indeed, the fashion of her clothes, to learn the trick of her voice, of her slow, soft gait, of her little, surprised laugh. But I soon gave it up. If I tried till my death-day, I should never arrive at any thing but a miserable travesty. Before—ere Roger's return—I used complacently to treasure up any little civil speeches, any small compliments that people paid me, thinking, "If such and such a one think me pleasing, why may not Roger?" But now I have given this up, too.

I seem to myself to have grown very dull. I think my wits are not so bright as they used to be. At home, I used to be reckoned one of the pleasantest of us: the boys used to laugh when I said things: but not even the most hysterically mirthful could find food for laughter in my talk now.

And so the days pass; and we go to London. Sometimes I have thought that it will be better when we get there. At least, *she* will not be there. How can she, with her husband gnashing his teeth in lonely discomfiture at his exasperated creditors, and receiptless bills, in sultry St. Thomas? But, somehow, she is. What good Samaritan takes out his twopence and pays for her little apartment, for her stacks of cut flowers, for her brougham and her opera-boxes, is no concern

of mine. But, somehow, there always *are* good Samaritans in those cases; and, let alone Samaritans, there are no priests or Levites stony-hearted enough to pass by these dear, little, lovely things, on the other side.

We go out a good deal, Roger and I, and everywhere he accompanies me. It bores him infinitely, though he does not say so. One night, we are at the play. It is the Prince of Wales's, the one theatre where one may enjoy a pleasant certainty of being rationally amused, of being free from the otherwise universal dominion of *Limelight* and *Legs*. The little house is very full; it always is. Some of the royalties are here, laughing "*à gorge déployée!*" I have been laughing, too; laughing in my old fashion; not in Mrs. Zéphine's little rippling way, but with the thorough-paced, uneonventional violence with which I used to reward the homely sallies of Bobby and the Brat. I am laughing still, though the curtain has fallen between the acts, and the orchestra are fiddling gayly away, and the turned-up gas making everybody look pale. My opera-glasses are in my hand, and I am turning them slowly round the house, making out acquaintances in the stalls, prying into the secrets of the boxes, examining the well-known features of my future king.

Suddenly my smile dies away, and the glasses drop from my trembling hands into my lap. Who is it that has just entered, and is slipping across the intervening people in the stalls to his own seat, one of the few that have hitherto remained vacant beneath us? Can I help recognizing the close-shorn, cameo-like beauty—to me *no* beauty; to me deformity and ugliness—of the dark face that for months I daily saw by my fireside? Can there be *two* Musgraves? No! it is *he!* yes, *he!* though now there is on his features none of the baffled passion, none of the wrathful malignity, which they always wear in my memory, as they wore in the February dusk of Brindley Wood. Now, in their handsome serenity, they wear only the look of subdued sadness that a male Briton always assumes when he takes his pleasure. Do you remember what Goldsmith says? "When I see an Englishman laugh, I fancy I rather see him hunting after joy than having caught it."

As soon as my eyes have fallen upon, and certainly recognized him, by a double impulse I draw back behind the curtain of the box, and look at Roger. He, too, has seen him; I can tell it in an instant by his face, and by the expression of his eyes, as they meet mine. I try to look back unflinchingly, indifferently at him. I would give ten years of my life for an unmoved complexion, but it is no use. Struggle as I will against it, I feel that rush, that torrent of vivid scarlet, that, retiring, leaves me as white as my gown. Oh, it *is* hard, is not it, that the lying changefulness of a deceitful skin should have power to work me such hurt?

"Are you faint?" Roger asks, bending toward me, and speaking in a low and icy voice; "shall I get you a glass of water?"

"No, thank you!" I reply, resolutely, and with no hesitation or stammer in my tone, "I am not at all faint."

But, alas! my words cannot undo what my false cheeks, with their meaningless red and their causeless white, have so fully done.

The season is over now; every one has trooped away from the sun-baked squares, and the sultry streets of the great empty town. I have never *done* a season before, and the heat and the late hours have tired me wofully. Often, when I have gone to a ball, I have longed to go to bed instead. And, now that we are home again, it would seem to me very pleasant to sit in leisurely coolness by the pool, and to watch the birth, and the prosperous short lives, of the late roses, and the great bright gladioli in the garden-borders. Yes, it would have seemed very pleasant to me—if—(why is life so full of *ifs?* "Ifs" and "Buts," "Ifs" and "Buts," it seems made up of them! Little ugly words! in heaven there will be none of you!)—if—to back and support the outward good luck, there had been any inward content. But there is none! The trouble that I took with me to London, I have brought back thence whole and undiminished.

It is September now; so far has the year advanced! We are well into the partridges. Their St. Bartholomew has begun. Roger is away among the thick green turnip-ridges and the short white stubble all the day. I wish to Heaven that I could shoot, too, and hunt. It would not matter if I never killed any thing—indeed, I think—of the two—I had rather not; I had rather have a course of empty bags and blank days than snuff out

any poor, little, happy lives; but the occupation that these amusements would entail would displace and hinder the minute mental torments I now daily, in my listless, luxurious idleness, endure. I am thinking these thoughts one morning, as I turn over my unopened letters, and try, with the misplaced ingenuity and labor one is so apt to employ in such a case, to make out from the general air of their exteriors—from their superscriptions—from their post-marks, whom they are from. About one there is no doubt. It is from Barbara. I have not heard from Barbara for a fortnight or three weeks. It will be the usual thing, I suppose. Father has got the gout in his right toe, or his left calf, or his wrist, or all his fingers, and is, consequently, fuller than usual of hatred and malice; mother's neuralgia is very bad, and she is sadly in want of change, but she cannot leave him. Algy has lost a lot of money at Goodwood, and they are afraid to tell father, etc., etc. Certainly, life is rather up-hill! I slowly tear the envelope open, and languidly throw my eyes along the lines. But, before I have read three words, my languor suddenly disappears. I sit upright in my chair, grasp the paper more firmly, bring it nearer my eyes, which begin greedily to gallop through its contents. They are not very long, and in two minutes I have mastered them.

"My Dearest Nancy:

"I have *such* a piece of news for you! I cannot help laughing as I picture to myself your face of delight; I would make you guess it, only I cannot bear to keep you in suspense. *It has all come right! I am going to marry Frank, after all!* What *have* I done to deserve such luck! How can I ever thank God enough for it? Do you know that my very first thought, when he asked me, was, '*How* pleased Nancy will be!' You dear little soul! I think, when he went away that time from Tempest, that you took all the blame of it to yourself! O Nancy, do you think it is wrong to be so *dreadfully* happy? Sometimes I am afraid that I love him *too* much! it seems so hard to help it. I have no time for more now; he is waiting for me; how little I thought, a month ago, that I should be ending a letter to you for such a reason! When all is said and done, what a pleasant world it is! Do not think me quite mad. I know I *sound* as if I were!

"Yours, Barbara."

My hand, and the letter with it, fall together into my lap; my head sinks back on the cushion of my chair; my eyes peruse the ceiling.

"Engaged to Musgrave! engaged to Musgrave! engaged to Musgrave!"

The words ring with a dull monotony of repetition through my brain. Poor Barbara! I think she would be surprised if she were to see my "*face of delight!*"

CHAPTER XL.

My eyes are fixed on the mouldings of the ceiling, while a jumble of thoughts mix and muddle themselves in my head. Was Brindley Wood a dream? or is this a dream? Surely one or the other must be, and, if this is not a dream, what is it? Is it reality, is it truth? And, if it is, how on earth did anything so monstrous ever come about? How did he dare to approach her? How could he know that I had not told her? Is it possible that he cares for her really?—that he cared for her all along?—that he only went mad for one wicked moment? Is he sorry? how soon shall I have to meet him? On what terms shall we be? Will Roger be undeceived at last? Will he believe me? As my thoughts fall upon him, he opens the door and enters.

"Well, I am off, Nancy!" he says, speaking in his usual cool, friendly voice, to which I have now grown so accustomed that sometimes I could almost persuade myself that I had never known any lovinger terms; and standing with the door-handle in his hand.

He rarely kisses me now; never upon any of these little temporary absences. We always part with polite, cold, verbal salutations. Then, with a sudden change of tone, approaching me as he speaks—

"Is there any thing the matter? have you had bad news?"

My eyes drop at length from the scroll and pomegranate flower border of the ceiling. I sit up, and, with an involuntary movement,

put my hand over the open letter that lies in my lap.

"I have had news," I answer dubiously.

"If it is any thing that you had rather not tell me!" he says, hastily, observing my stupid and unintentional gesture, and, I suppose, afraid that I am about to drift into a second series of lies—"please do not. I would not for worlds thrust myself on your confidence!"

"It is no secret of mine," I answer, coldly, "everybody will know it immediately, I suppose; it is that Barbara—" I stop, as usual choked as I approach the abhorred theme. "Will you read the letter, please? that will be better!—yes—I had rather that you did—it will not take you long; yes, *all* of it!" (seeing that he is holding the note in his hand and conscientiously looking away from it as if expecting limitation as to the amount he is to peruse).

He complies. There is silence—an expectant silence on my part. It is not of long duration. Before ten seconds have elapsed the note has fallen from his hand; and, with an exclamation of the profoundest astonishment, he is looking with an expression of the most keenly-questioning wonder at me.

"To Musgrave!"

I nod. I have judiciously placed myself with my back to the light, so that, if that exasperating flood of crimson bathe my face—and bathe it it surely will—is not it coming now?—do not I feel it creeping hotly up?—it may be as little perceptible as possible.

"It must be a great, great *surprise* to you!" he says, interrogatively, and still with that sound of extreme and baffled wonder in his tone.

"Immense!" reply I.

I speak steadily, if low; and I look determinedly back in his face. Whatever color my cheeks are—I believe they are of the devil's own painting—I feel that my eyes are honest. He has picked up the note, and is reading it again.

"She seems to have no doubt"—(with rising wonder in face and voice)—"as to its greatly pleasing *you!*"

"So it would have done at one time," I answer, still speaking (though no one could guess with what difficulty), with resolute equanimity.

"And does not it now?" (very quickly, and sending the searching scrutiny of his eyes through me).

"I do not know," I answer, hazily, putting up my hand to my forehead. "I cannot make up my mind, it all seems so sudden."

A pause. Roger has forgotten the partridges. He is sunk in reflection.

"Was there ever any talk of this before?" he says, presently, with a hesitating and doubtful accent, and an altogether staggered look. "Had you any reason—any ground for thinking that he cared about her?"

"Great ground," reply I, touching my cheeks with the tips of my fingers, and feeling, with a sense of self-gratulation, that their temperature is gradually, if slowly, lowering, "*every* ground—at *one* time!"

"At *what* time?"

"In the autumn," say I, slowly; my mind reluctantly straying back to the season of my urgent invitations, of my pressing friendlinesses, "and at Christmas, and after Christmas."

"Yes?" (with a quick eagerness, as if expecting to hear more).

"The boys," continue I, speaking without any ease or fluency, for the subject is always one irksome and difficult to me—"the boys took it quite for granted—looked upon it as a certain thing that he meant seriously until—"

"Until what?" (almost snatching the words out of my mouth).

"Until—well!" (with a short, forced laugh), "until they found that he did not."

"And—do you know?—but of course you do—can you tell me how they discovered that?"

He is looking at me with that same greedy anxiety in his eyes, which I remember in our last fatal conversation about Musgrave.

"He went away," reply I, unable any longer to keep watch and ward over my countenance and voice, rising and walking hastily to the window.

The moment I have done it, I repent. *However* red I was, *however* confused I looked, it would have been better to have remained and faced him. For several minutes there is silence. I look out at the stiff comeliness of the variously-tinted asters, at the hoary-colored dew that is like a film along the morning grass. I do not know what *he* looks at, because I have my back to him, but I think

he is looking at Barbara's note again. At least, I judge this by what he says next—"Poor little soul!" (in an accent of the honestest, tenderest pity), "how happy she seems!"

"Ah!" say I, with a bitter little laugh, "she will mend of *that*, will not she?"

He does not echo my mirth; indeed, I think I hear him sigh.

> "'Romances paint at full length people's wooings,
> But only give a bust of marriages!'"

say I, in soft quotation, addressing rather myself and my thoughts than my companion.

He has joined me; he, too, is looking out at the serene aster-flowers, at the glittering glory of the dew.

"Since when have you learned to quote 'Don Juan?'" he asks, with a sort of surprise.

"Since *when?*" I reply, with the same tart playfulness—"oh! since I married! I date all my accomplishments from then!—it is my anno Domini."

Another silence. Then Sir Roger speaks again, and this time his words seem as slow and difficult of make as mine were just now.

"Nancy!" he says, in a low voice, not looking at me, but still facing the flowers and the sunshiny autumn sward, "do you believe that—that—*this fellow* cares about her really?—she is too good to be made—to be made—a *cat's-paw* of!"

"A *cat's-paw!*" cry I, turning quickly round with raised voice; the blood that so lately retired from it rushing again headlong all over my face; "I do not know—what you mean—what you are talking about!"

He draws his breath heavily, and pauses a moment before he speaks.

"God knows," he says, looking solemnly up, "that I had no wish to broach this subject again—God knows that I meant to have done with it forever—but now that it has been forced against my will—against both our wills—upon me, I must ask you this one question—tell me, Nancy—tell me truly *this* time"—(with an accent of acute pain on the word "*this*")—can you say, *on your honor—on your honor*, mind—that you believe this—this man loves Barbara, as a man should love his wife?"

If he had worded his interrogation differently, I should have been sorely puzzled to answer it; as it is, in the form his question takes, I find a loop-hole of escape.

"As a man should love his wife?" I reply, with a derisive laugh, "and how is that? I do not think I quite know!—very dearly, I suppose, but not quite so dearly as if she were his neighbor's—is that it?"

As I speak, I look up at him, with a malicious air of pseudo-innocence. But if I expect to see any guilt—any conscious shrinking in his face—I am mistaken. There is pain—infinite pain—pain both sharp and long-enduring in the grieved depths of his eyes; but there is no guilt.

"You will not answer me?" he says, in an accent of profound disappointment, sighing again heavily. "Well, I hardly expected it—hardly hoped it!—so be it, then, since you will have it so; and yet—" (again taking up the note, and reading over one of its few sentences with slow attention), "and yet there is one more question I must put to you, after all—they both come to pretty much the same thing. Why"—(pointing, as he speaks, to the words to which he alludes)—"why should *you* have taken on yourself the blame of—of his departure from Tempest? what had *you* to say to it?"

In his voice there is the same just severity; in his eyes there is the same fire of deep yet governed wrath that I remember in them six months ago, when Mrs. Huntley first threw the firebrand between us.

"I do not know," I reply, in a half whisper of impatient misery, turning my head restlessly from side to side; "how should I know? I am *sick* of the subject."

"Perhaps!—so, God knows, am I; but *had* you any thing to say to it?"

He does not often touch me now; but, as he asks this, he takes hold of both my hands, more certainly to prevent my escaping from under his gaze, than from any desire to caress me.

It is my last chance of confession. I little thought I should ever have another. Late as it is, shall I avail myself of it? Nay! if not before, why *now?* Why *now?*—when there are so much stronger reasons for silence—when to speak would be to knock to atoms the newly-built edifice of Barbara's happiness—to rake up the old and nearly dead ashes of

Frank's frustrated, and for aught I know, sincerely repented sin? So I answer faintly indeed, yet quite audibly and distinctly:

"Nothing."

"NOTHING?" (in an accent and with eyes of the keenest, wistfulest interrogation, as if he would wring from me, against my will, the confession I so resolutely withhold).

But I turn away from that heart-breaking, heart-broken scrutiny, and answer:

"Nothing!"

CHAPTER XLI.

"She dwells with beauty—beauty that must die,
And joy whose hands is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu!"

THUS I accomplished my second lie: I that, at home, used to be a proverb for blunt truth-telling. They say that "*facilis descensus Averni.*" I do not agree with them. I have not found it easy. To me it has seemed a very steep and precipitous road, set with sharp flints that cut the feet, and make the blood flow.

I think the second falsehood was almost harder to utter than the first: but, indeed, they were both very disagreeable. I cannot think why any one should have thought it necessary to invent the doctrine of a future retribution for sin.

It appears to me that, in this very life of the present, each little delinquency is so heavily paid for—so exorbitantly overpaid, indeed. Look, for instance, at my own case. I told a lie—a lie more of the letter than the spirit—and since then I have spent six months of my flourishing youth absolutely devoid of pleasure, and largely penetrated with pain.

I have stood just outside my paradise, peeping under and over the flaming sword of the angel that guards it. I have been near enough to smell the flowers—to see the downy, perfumed fruits—to hear the song of the angels as they go up and down within its paths; but I have been outside.

Now I have told another lie, and I suppose—nay, what better can I hope?—that I shall live in the same state of weary, disproportioned retribution to the end of the chapter.

These are the thoughts, interspersed and diversified with loud sighs, that are employing my mind one ripe and misty morning a few days later than the incidents last detailed.

Barbara is to arrive to-day. She is coming to pay us a visit—coming, like the lady mentioned by Tennyson, in "In Memoriam"—not, indeed, "to bring her babe," but to "make her boast." And how, pray, am I to listen with complacent congratulation to this boast? For the first time in my life, I dread the coming of Barbara. How am I, whose acting, on the few occasions when I have attempted it, has been of the most improbably wooden description—how am I, I say, to counterfeit the extravagant joy, the lively sympathy, that Barbara will expect—and naturally expect—from me?

I get up and look at myself in the glass. Assuredly I shall have to take some severe measures with my countenance before it falls under my sister's gaze. Small sympathy and smaller joy is there in it now—it wears only a lantern-jawed, lack-lustre despondency. I practise a galvanized smile, and say out aloud, as if in dialogue with some interlocutor:

"Yes, *delightful!*—I am *so* pleased!" but there is more mirth in the enforced grin of an unfleshed skull than in mine.

That will never take in Barbara. I try again—once, twice—each time with less prosperity than the last. Then I give it up. I must trust to Providence.

As the time for her coming draws nigh, I fall to thinking of the different occasions since my marriage, on which I have watched for expected comings from this window—have searched that bend in the drive with impatient eyes—and of the disappointment to which, on the two occasions that rise most prominently before my mind's eye, I became a prey.

Well, I am to be subject to no disappointment—if it *would* be a disappointment—to-day.

Almost before I expect her—almost before she is due—she is here in the room with me, and we are looking at one another. I, indeed, am staring at her with a black and stupid surprise.

"Good Heavens!" say I, bluntly, "what *have* you been doing to yourself? *how* happy you look!"

I have always known theoretically that happiness was becoming; and I have always thought Barbara most fair.

"Fairer than Rachel by the palmy well,
Fairer than Ruth among the fields of corn,
Fair as the angel that said, 'Hail!' she seemed;"

but *now*, what a lovely brightness, like that of clouds remembering the gone sun, shines all about her! What a radiant laughter in her eyes! What a splendid carnation on her cheeks! (How glad I am that I did not tell!)

"Do I?" she says, softly, and hiding her face, with the action of a shy child, on my shoulder. "I dare say."

"*Good* Heavens!" repeat I, again, with more accentuation than before, and with my usual happy command and variety of ejaculation.

"And *you?*" she says, lifting her face, and speaking with a joyful confidence of anticipation in her innocent eyes, "and *you?* you are pleased too, are not you?"

"Of course," reply I, quickly calling to my aid the galvanized smile and the unnatural tone in which I have been perfecting myself all the forenoon, "*delighted!* I never was so pleased in my life. I told you so in my letters, did not I?"

A look of nameless disappointment crosses her features for a moment.

"Yes," she says, "I know! but I want you to tell me again. I thought that you—would have such a—such a great deal to say about it."

"So I have!" reply I, uncomfortably, fiddling uneasily with a paper-knife that I have picked up, and trying how much ill-usage it will bear without snapping, "an immensity! but you see it is—it is difficult to begin, is not it? and you know I never was good at expressing myself, was I?"

We have sat down. I am not facing her. With a complexion that serves one such ill turns as mine does, one is not over-fond of *facing* people. I am beside her. For a moment we are both silent.

"Well," say I, presently, with an unintentional tartness in my tone, "why do not you begin? I am waiting to hear all about it! Begin!"

So Barbara begins.

"I am afraid," she says, smiling all the while, but growing as red as the bunch of late roses in my breast, "that I looked horribly *pleased!* One ought to look as if one did not care, ought not one?"

"Ought one?" say I, with interest, then beginning to laugh vociferously. "At least you were not as bad as the old maid who late in life received a very wealthy offer, and was so much elated by it that she took off all her clothes, and kicked her bonnet round the room.

Barbara laughs.

"No, I was not quite so bad as that."

"And how did he do it?" pursue I, inquisitively. "Did he write or speak?"

"He spoke."

"And what did he say? How did he word it? Ah!"—(with a sigh)—"I suppose you will not tell me *that?*"

She has abandoned her chair, and has fallen on her knees before me, hiding her face in my lap. Delicious waves of color, like the petals of a pink sweet-pea, are racing over her cheeks and throat.

"Was ever any one known to tell it?" she says, indistinctly.

"Yes," reply I, "*I* was. I told you what Roger said, word for word—all of you!"

"*Did* you?"—(with an accent of astonished incredulity).

"Yes," say I, "do not you remember? I promised I would before I went into the drawing-room that day, and, when I came out, I wanted the boys to let me off, but they would not."

A pause.

"I wish," say I, a little impatiently, "that you would look up! Why need you mind if you *are* rather red? What do *I* matter? and so—and so—you are *pleased!*"

"*Pleased!*"

She has raised her head as I bid her, and on her face there is a sort of scorn at the poverty and inadequacy of the expression, and yet she replaces it with no other; only the sapphire of her eyes is dimmed and made more tender by rising tears.

Clearly we were never meant to be joyful, we humans! In any bliss greater than our wont, we can only hang out, to demonstrate our felicity, the sign and standard of woe.

"Nancy!"—(taking my hand, and looking at me with wistful earnestness)—"do you think it *can* last? Did ever any one feel as I do for *long?*"

"I do not know—how can I tell?" reply I, discomfortably, as I absently eye the two

halves of my paper-knife, which, after having given one or two warning cracks, has now snapped in the middle. Then Roger enters, and our talk ends.

CHAPTER XLII.

"God made a foolish woman, making me!"

"HAVE you any idea whom we shall meet?"

It is Barbara who asks this one morning at breakfast. The question refers to a three days' visit that it has become our fate to pay to a house in the neighborhood—a house not eight miles distant from Tempest, and over which we are grumbling in the minute and exhaustive manner which people mostly employ when there is a question of making merry with their friends.

I shake my head.

"I have not an idea, that is to say, except Mrs. Huntley, and she goes without saying!"

"Why?"

"We are known to be such inseparables, that she is always asked to meet us," reply I, with that wintry smile, which is my last accomplishment.—"We pursue her round the country, do not we, Roger?"

Barbara opens her great eyes, but, with her usual tact, she says nothing. She sees that she has fallen on stony ground.

"She is *the oldest friend that we have in the world!*" continue I, laughing pleasantly.

Roger does not answer, he does not even look up, but, by a restless movement that he makes in his chair, by a tiny contraction of the brows, I see that my shot has told. I am becoming an adept in the infliction of these pin-pricks. It is one of the few pleasures I have left.

The day of our visit has come. We have relieved our feelings by grumbling up to the hall-door. Our murmuring must perforce be stilled now, though indeed, were we to *shout* our discontents at the top of our voices, there would be small fear of our being overheard by the master of the house, he being the boundlessly deaf old gentleman who paid his respects at Tempest on the day of Mrs. Huntley's first call, and insisted on mistaking Barbara for me. Whether he is yet set right on that head is a point still enveloped in Cimmerian gloom.

It is a bachelor establishment, as any one may perceive by a cursory glance at the disposition of the drawing-room furniture, and at the unfortunate flowers, tightly jammed, packed as thickly as they will go in one huge central bean-pot.

As we arrived rather late and were at once conducted to our rooms, we still remain in the dark as to our co-guests. Personally, I am not much interested in the question. There cannot be anybody that it will cause me much satisfaction to meet. It would give me a faint relief, indeed, to find that there were some matron of exalteder rank than mine to save me from my probable fate of bowling dark sayings at our old host, General Parker, from the season of clear soup to that of peaches and nuts. I dress quickly. The toilet is never to me a work of art. It is not that from my lofty moral stand-point I look down upon meretricious aids to faulty Nature. If I thought that it would set me on a fairer standing with Mrs. Zéphine, I would paint my cheeks an inch thick; would prune my eyebrows; daub my eyes, and make my hair yellower than any buttercups in the meadow; but I know that it would be of no avail. I should still be, compared to her, as a sign-painting to a Titian. For a long time now I have cared naught for clothes. I used greatly to respect their power, but they have done *me* no good; and so my reverence for them is turned into indifference and contempt.

I think that I must be late. Roger went down some minutes ago, at my request, so that there might be *one* representative of the family in time.

I hasten down-stairs, fastening my last bracelet as I go, and open the drawing-room door. I was wrong. There is no one down yet: even Roger has disappeared. I am the first. This is my impression for the moment; then I perceive that there is some one in the bow-window, half hidden by the drooped curtains; some one who, hearing my entry, is advancing to meet me. It is Musgrave! My first impulse, a wrong one, I need hardly say, is to turn and flee. I have even laid hold of the just abandoned handle, when he speaks.

"Are you going?" he says, in a low voice, marked by great and evidently ungovernable agitation; "do not! if you wish, I will leave the room."

I look at him, and our eyes meet. He always was a pale young man—no bucolic beef-and-beer ruddiness about him—always of a healthy swart pallor; but now he is deadly white!—so, by-the-by, I fancy am I! His dark eyes burn with a shamed yet eager glow.

With the words and tones of our last parting ringing in our ears, we both feel that it would be useless affectation to attempt to meet as ordinary acquaintance.

"No," say I, faintly, almost in a whisper, "it—it does not matter! only that I did not know that you were to be here!"

"No more did I, until this morning!" he answers, eagerly; "this morning—at the last moment—young Parker asked me to come down with him—and I—I knew we must meet sooner or later—that it could not be put off forever, and so I thought we might as well get over it here as anywhere else!"

Neither of us has thought of sitting down. He is speaking with rapid, low emotion, and I stand stupidly listening.

"I suppose so," I answer, lazily. I cannot for the life of me help it, friends. I am back in Brindley Wood. He has come a few steps nearer me. His voice is always low, but now it is almost a whisper in which he is so rapidly, pantingly speaking.

"I shall most likely not have another opportunity, probably we shall not be alone again, and I *must* hear, I *must* know—have you forgiven me?"

As he speaks, the recollection of all the ill he has done me, of my lost self-respect, my alienated Roger, my faded life, pass before my mind.

"*That* I have not!" reply I, looking full at him, and speaking with a distinct and heavy emphasis of resentment and aversion, "and, by God's help, I never will!"

"You will *not?*" he cries, starting back with an expression of the utmost anger and discomfiture. "You will *not!* you will carry vengeance for one mad minute through a whole life! It is *impossible! impossible!* if *you* are so unforgiving, how do you expect God to forgive you your sins?"

I shrug my shoulders with a sort of despairing contempt. God has seemed to me but dim of late.

"He may forgive them or leave them unforgiven as He sees best; but—*I will never forgive you!*"

"What!" he cries, his face growing even more ash-white than it was before, and his voice quivering with a passionate anger; "not for *Barbara's* sake?"

I shudder. I hate to hear him pronounce her name.

"No," say I, steadily, "not for Barbara's sake!"

"You will have to," he cries violently; "it is nonsense! think of the close connection, of the *relationship* that there will be between us! think of the remarks you will excite! you will defeat your own object!"

"I will excite no remark!" I reply, resolutely. "I will be quite civil to you! I will say 'good-morning' and 'good-evening' to you; if you ask me a question I will answer it; but—I will *never* forgive you!"

We are standing, as I before observed, close together, and are so wholly occupied—voices, eyes, and ears—with each other, that we do not perceive the approach of two hitherto unseen people who are coming dawdling and chatting up the conservatory that opens out of the room; two people that I suppose have been there, unknown to us, all along. They have come quite close now, and we must needs perceive them.

In a second our eager talk drops into silence, and we look with involuntary, startled apprehension toward them. They are Roger and Mrs. Huntley. This is why he acceded with such alacrity to my request. This is why he was so afraid of being late. He has been helping her to smell the jasmine, and to look down the datura's great white trumpet-throats.

Even at this agitated moment I have time to think this with a jeering pain. The next instant all other feelings are swallowed up in breathless dread as to how they will meet. My fears are groundless. On first becoming aware, indeed, whose *tête-à-tête* it is that he has interrupted, whose low quick voices they are that have dropped into such sudden, suspicious silence at his approach—I can see him start perceptibly, can see his gray eyes dart with lightning quickness from Musgrave to me, and from me to Musgrave; and in his voice there is to me an equally perceptible tone of ice-coldness; but to an ordinary ob-

server it would seem the greeting, neither more nor less warm, exchanged between two moderately friendly acquaintances meeting after absence.

"How are you, Musgrave? I had no idea that you were in this part of the world!"

"No more had I!" answers Musgrave, with an exaggerated laugh. "No more I was, until—until *to-day*."

He has not caught the infection of Roger's stately calm. His face has not recovered a *trace* of even its usual slight color, and his eyes are twitching nervously. Mrs. Huntley appears unaware of any thing. Her artistic eye has been caught by the tight bean-pot, and her fingers are employed in trying to give a little air of ease and liberty to its crowded inmates. Then, thank God, the others come in, and dinner is announced, and the situation is ended.

The old host, still under the influence of his hallucination, is bearing down like a hawk (with his old bent elbow extended) on Barbara, until intercepted and redirected by a whispered roar and graphic pantomime on the part of his nephew. Then, at last, he realizes Roger's bad taste, and we go in.

As soon as we are seated, I look about me. It is a round table. For my part, I hate a round table. There is no privacy in it. Everybody seems eavesdropping on everybody else.

There are only eight of us in all—those I have enumerated, and Algy. Yes, he is here. Bellona is a goddess who can always spare her sons when there is any chance of their getting into mischief. Roger has taken Mrs. Huntley. *That*, poor man, he could hardly help, his only alternative being his own sister-in-law. Musgrave has taken Barbara. He is still as white as the table-cloth, and hardly speaks. It is clear that *he* will not get up his conversation again, until after the champagne has been round. Algy has taken no one; and, consequently, a bear is an amiable and affable beast in comparison of him. I am placed between our host and his nephew. The latter comes in for a good deal of my conversation, as most of my remarks have to be taken up and rebellowed by him with a loud emphasis, that contrasts absurdly with their triviality; and even then they mostly miscarry, and turn into something totally different.

Talking to the old man is not a dialogue, but a couple of soliloquies, carried on mostly on different subjects, which in vain try to become the same, between two interlocutors. Through soup we prospered—that is to say, we talked of the weather; and though I said several things about it that surprised me a good deal, yet we both knew that we *were* talking of the weather. But since then we have been diverging ever more and more hopelessly. *He* is at the shah's visit, and so he imagines am I. I, on the contrary, am at the Bishop of Winchester's death, and, for the last five minutes, have been trying, with all the force of my lungs, and with a face rendered scarlet by the double action of heat and of the consciousness of being the object of respectful attention to the whole company, to convey to him that, in my opinion, the deceased prelate ought to have been buried in Westminster Abbey. I have at last succeeded, at least in so far as to make him understand that I wish *somebody* to be buried in Westminster Abbey; but, as he still persists in thinking it the shah, we are perhaps not much better off than we were before. I lean back with a sense of despairing defeat, and, behind my fan, turn to the young man on the other side. He is a jolly-looking fellow, with an aureole of fiery red hair.

"Would you mind," say I, with panting appeal, "trying to make him understand that it *is not* the shah?"

He complies, and, while he is trying to make it clear to his uncle that he wrongs me in crediting me with any wish to thrust the Persian monarch among the ashes of the Plantagenets, I take breath, and look round again. Algy is eating nothing, and drinking every thing that is offered to him. His face is not much redder than Musgrave's, and he is glancing across the table at Mrs. Huntley, with the haggard anger of his eyes. Of this, however, she seems innocently unaware. She is leaning back in her chair; so is Roger. They are talking low and quickly, and looking smilingly at each other. When does his face ever light up into such alert animation when he is talking to me? There can be no doubt of it! Why blink a thing because it is unpleasant? I *bore him*.

I have no intention of listening, and yet I hear some of their words—enough to teach

me the drift of their talk. "Residency!" "Cawnpoor!" "Simlah!" "*Cursed* Simlah!" "*Cursed* Cawnpore!" My attention is recalled by the voice of my old neighbor.

"Talking of that—" he says—(talking of *what*, in Heaven's name?)—"I once knew a man—a doctor, at Norwich—who did not marry till he was seventy-eight, and had four as fine children as any man need wish to see."

By the extraordinary irrelevancy of this anecdote, I am so taken aback that, for a moment, I am unable to utter. Seeing, however, that some comment is expected from me, I stammer something about its being a great age. He, however, imagines that I am asking whether they are boys or girls.

"Three boys and a girl, or three girls and a boy!" he answers, with loud distinctness—"I cannot recollect which; but, after all—" (with an acrid chuckle)—"that is not the point of the story!"

I sink back in my chair with a slight shiver.

"Give it up!" says my other neighbor, with a compassionate smile, and speaking in a voice not a whit lower than usual—"*I* would!—it really is no good!"

"Why does not he have a *trumpet?*" ask I, with a slight accent of irritation, for I have suffered much, and it is hot.

"He had one once," replies my companion, still pityingly regarding the flushed discomposure of my face; "but people *would* insist on bawling so loudly down it, that they nearly broke the drum of his ear, and so *he* broke *it*."

I laugh a little, but in a puny way. There is not much laugh in me. Again I look round the table. Musgrave is better; he is a better color than he was. Under the influence of Barbara's gentle talk, his features have reassumed almost serenity. Algy is *no* better. I see him lean back, and speak to the servant behind him. He is asking for more champagne. I wish he would not. He has had quite enough already. Roger and Mrs. Huntley are much as they were. They are still leaning back in their chairs—still looking with friendly intimacy into each other's eyes—still smiling. Again a few words of their talk reach me.

"Do you recollect?"

"Do you remember?"

"Have you forgotten?"

Clearly, they have fallen upon old times. I wish—I dearly wish—that I might bite a piece out of somebody.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"I saw pale kings, and princes, too;
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all,
They cried, 'La Belle Dame, sans merci,'
Hath thee in thrall."

The long penance of dinner is over at last, thank God! I may intermit my hopeless roarings, melancholy as those of any caged zoological beast. Roger and Zéphine must also fain suspend their reminiscences. There being no lady of the house, I have taken upon myself to hasten the date of our departure. Before Mrs. Zéphine has finished her last grape, I have swept her incontinently away into the drawing-room. But I might as well have let it alone: almost before you could say "Knife" they are after us. I suppose that when three are eager to come, and only two anxious to stay—(I acquit my old friend and his nephew of any over-hurry to rejoin us)—the three must needs get their way. Anyhow, here they all five are! I am so hot! so hot! Nothing heats one like bellowing and being miserable and a failure. I have again taken advantage of the mistressless condition of the establishment, have drawn back the window-curtains, and lifted the heavy sash. The night always soothes me. There is something so stilling in the far placidity of the stars—in the sweet sharpness of the night winds. I have sat down on a couch in the embrasure alone.

When the men come in, I remain alone. It does not at all surprise or much vex me. I have nothing pleasant to say to any one. Also, I think I must be almost hidden by the droop of the curtains. Roger, indeed, sent his eyes round the room on his first entry, as if searching for something or somebody. It cannot be Mrs. Huntley, who is right under his nose, and who is, indeed, saying something playful to him over the top of her black fan. For once, he does not hear her. He is still looking. Then he catches a glimpse of my skirts, and comes straight toward me. Thank God! it *was* me he was looking for. I feel a little throb of disused gladness, as I realize this.

"Are you not cold?" he says, perceiving the open window.

"Not I!" reply I, brusquely—"naught never comes to harm."

"I wish you would have a shawl!" he says, as the evening wind comes, with the tartness of autumn, to his face.

"Why do not you say, '*do, for my sake!*' as Algy once said to me, when he mistook me in the dark for Mrs. Huntley?" reply I, with a mocking laugh—"I am not sure that he did not add *darling*, but I will excuse *that!*"

At the mention of Algy, a shade crosses his face, and his eye travels to where, in the dignified solitude of a corner, my eldest brother is sitting, biting his lips, and reading "Alice Through the Looking-glass," upside down.

"Foolish fellow! I wish he had not come!"

"I dare say he returns the compliment."

"I wish she would leave him alone!" he says, with an accent of impatience, more to himself than to me.

"That is so likely," say I, quickly, "so much her way, is not it?"

I suppose that something in the exceeding bitterness of my tone strikes him, for his eyes return from Algy to me.

"Nancy," he says, speaking with a sort of hesitating impulse, while a dark flush crosses his face, "it has occurred to me once or twice—if the idea had been less unspeakably absurd, it would have occurred to me many times—that you are—are *jealous* of Zéphine and me!—You jealous of ME!"

There is such a depth of emphasis in his last words—such a wealth of reproachful appeal in the eyes that are bent on me—that I can answer nothing. I say neither yea nor nay. He has sat down on the couch beside me.

"Tell me," he says, with low, quick excitement—"and for God's sake do not grow scarlet, and turn your head aside as you mostly have done—did you, or did you not know that—that *Musgrave* was to be here today?"

"I *did not—indeed* I *did not!*" I cry, with passionate eagerness; thankful for once to be able to tell the truth; "we none of us did—not even Barbara!"

He repeats my last words with a slightly sarcastic inflection, "*not even Barbara!*"

A moment's pause.

"Why did you stop talking so suddenly, the moment that we interrupted you?" he asks, with an abruptness that is almost harsh—"what were you talking about?"

Phew! how hot it is! even though one is by the open window!—even despite the cool moistness of the night wind.

"I was—I was—I was—congratulating him!" I say, doing the very thing he has forbidden me, reddening and turning half away. He makes no rejoinder; only I hear him sigh, and put his hand with a quick, impatient movement to his head.

"You believe me?" I ask, timidly, laying my hand on his arm.

"No, *I do not!*" he replies, shaking off my touch, and turning his stern and glittering eyes full upon me. "I should be a *fool* and an *idiot* if I did!"

Then he rises hastily and leaves me. I watch him as he joins the other men. They are *all* round her now—all but Musgrave.

Algy has left his corner and his reversed picture-book, moved thereto by the unparalleled audacity of young Parker, who has pulled one of the sofa-cushions down on the floor, and is squatting on it, like a great toad at her feet, examining a gnat-bite on her sacred arm.

Even the old host is doing the agreeable according to his lights. In a very loud voice he is narrating a long anecdote about a pretty girl that he once saw at a windmill near Seville, during the Peninsular. With a most unholy chuckle he is trying to hint that there was more between him and the young lady than it well becomes him to tell; but fortunately no one, but I, is listening to him.

I turn away my head, and look out of the window up at Charles Wain, and all my other bright old friends. No one is heeding me—no one sees me; so I drop my hot cheek on the sill.

Suddenly I start up. Some one is approaching me: some one has thrown himself with careless freedom on the couch beside me. It is Algy.

Having utterly failed in dislodging Mr. Parker from his cushion—having had a suggestion on his part, on the treatment of the gnat-bite, passed over in silent contempt—he has retired from the circle in dudgeon.

"This is lively, is not it?" he says, in an aggressively loud voice, as if he were quarrelsomely anxious to be overheard.

I say "Hush!" apprehensively.

"As no one makes the slightest attempt to entertain *us*, we must entertain each other, I suppose!"

"Yes, dear old boy!" I say, affectionately, "why not?—it would not be the first time by many."

"That does not make it any the more amusing!" he says, harshly.—"I say, Nancy"—his eyes fixing themselves with sullen greediness on the central figure of the group he has left—on the slight round arm (after all, not half so round or so white as Barbara's or mine)—which is still under treatment, "*is* eau de cologne good for those sort of bites?—her arm *is* bad, you know!"

"*Bad!*" echo I, scornfully; "*bad!* why, I am *all* lumps, more or less, and so is Barbara! who minds *us!*"

"You ought to make your old man—'*auld Robin Gray*'—mind you," he says, with a disagreeable laugh. "It is *his* business, but he does not seem to see it, does he? ha! ha!"

"I *wish!*" cry I, passionately; then I stop myself. After all, he is hardly himself to-night, poor Algy!

"By-the-by," he says, presently, with a wretchedly assumed air of carelessness, "is it true—it is as well to come to the fountain-head at once—is it true that *once*, some time in the dark ages, he—he—thought fit to engage himself to, to *her?*" (with a fierce accent on the last word).

A pain runs through my heart. Well, that is nothing new, nowadays. He too has heard it, then.

"I do not know!" I answer, faintly.

"What! he has not told you? *Kept it dark!* eh?" (with the same hateful laugh).

"He has kept nothing dark!" I answer, indignantly. "One day he began to tell me something, and I stopped him! I would not hear; I did not want to hear, I believe; I am sure that they are—only—only—old friends."

"*Old friends!*" he echoes, with a smile, in comparison of which our host's satyr-leer seems pleasant and chaste. "*Old friends!* you call yourself a woman of the world" (indeed I call myself nothing of the kind), "you call yourself a woman of the world, and believe *that!* They looked like *old friends* at dinner to-day, did not they? A little less than kin, and more than kind! Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

PARTRIDGES are not General Parker's strong point, and the few he ever had his nephew has already shot. Roger must, therefore, for one day abstain from the turnip-ridges. To amuse us, however, and keep us all sociably together, and bridge the yawning gulf between breakfast and dinner, we are to be sent on an expedition. Not only an expedition, but a picnic. This is perhaps a little risky in such a climate as ours, and in a month so doubtfully hovering on the borders of winter as September; but the sun is shining, and we therefore make up our minds, contrary to all precedent, that he must necessarily go on shining.

Some ten miles away there is a spot whence one can see seven counties, not to speak of the sea, a mountain or two, and some other trifles; and thither Mr. Parker is kindly going to bowl us down on his coach.

A drive on a coach is always to me a most doubtful joy; the ascent, labor; the drive itself, long anxiety and peril; the descent, agony, and sometimes shame. However, that is neither here nor there. I am going. It is still half an hour till the time appointed for our departure, and I am sitting alone in my room when Roger enters.

"Nancy," he says, coming quickly toward me, "have you any idea what sort of a whip that boy is?"

"Not the slightest!" reply I, shortly.

I feel as hard as a flint to-day. Algy's words last night seemed to have confirmed and given a solider reality to my worst fears. He has walked to the window and is looking out.

"Are you *nervous?*" say I, with a slightly sarcastic smile.

He does not appear to notice the sarcasm.

"Yes," he says, "that is just what I am. He is a mad sort of fellow, and a coach is not a thing to play tricks with!"

"No," say I, indifferently. It seems to me of infinitely little consequence whether we are upset or not.

"That is what I came to speak to you about!" he says, still looking out of the window. "Zéphine—"

"Is nervous, too?" ask I, smiling disagreeably. "What a curious coincidence!"

"I do not know whether she is nervous or not!" he answers, quickly; "I never asked her, but it seems that Huntley would never let her go on a drag; he had seen some bad accident, and it had given him a fright—"

"And so you and she are going to stay at home?" say I, coldly, but breathing a little heavily, and whitening.

"Stay at home!" he echoes, impatiently, "of course not; why should we? The fact is" (beginning to speak quickly in clear and eager explanation), "that I heard them talking of this plan yesterday, and so I thought I would be on the safe side, and send over to Tempest for the pony-carriage, and it is here now, and—"

"And you are going to drive her in it?" I say, still speaking quietly, and smiling. "I see! nothing could be nicer!"

"I wish to Heaven that you would not take the words out of my mouth," he cries, losing his temper a little; while his brows contract into a slight and most unwonted frown. "What I wish to know is, will *you* drive her?"

"I!"

"Yes, *you*; I know—" (speaking with a sort of hurried deprecation) "I know that you are not fond of her; she is not a woman that other women are apt to get on with; but it would not be for long! I tell you candidly" (with a look of sincere anxiety) "I do not half like trusting you to Parker!—I think you are as likely as not to come to grief."

"To come to grief!" repeat I, with a harsh, dry laugh; "ha! ha! perhaps I have done that already!"

"But will you?" he asks, eagerly; not heeding my sorry mirth, and taking my hand. "I would drive you myself, if I could, and if—" (almost humbly) "if it would not bore you; but you see—" (rather slowly) "about the carriage, she—she *asked* me, and one does not like to say 'No' to such an old friend!"

Old friend! At the phrase, Algy's sneering white face rises before my mind's eye.

"Will you?" he repeats, looking pleadingly at me, with the gray darkness of his eyes.

"No, I will not!" I reply, resolutely, and still with that unmirthful mirth; "whatever else I may be, I will not be a *spoil-sport!*"

"A *spoil-sport!*" he echoes passionately, while his face darkens, and hardens with impatient anger; "good God! will you *never* understand?"

Then he hastily leaves the room. And so it comes to pass that, half an hour later, I am crawling up with a sick heart to the box-seat, piteously calling on all around me to hold down my garments during my ascent. The grooms have let go the horses' heads, and have climbed up in dapper lightness at the back: we are through the first gate! Bah! that was a near shave of the post; yes, we are off, off for a long day's pleasuring! The very thought is enough to put any one in low spirits, is not it?

Barbara and Musgrave are behind us; and at the back, our old host and Algy. The two latter are, I think, specially likely to enjoy themselves; as the raw morning air has got down the old gentleman's throat, and he is coughing like a wheezy old squirrel; and Algy is in a dumb frenzy. I am no great judge of coachmanship, but we have not gone a quarter of a mile, before it is borne in on my mind that Mr. Parker has about as much idea of driving as a tomcat. The team do what is good in their eyes; we must throw ourselves on their clemency and discretion, for clearly our only hope is in them. He has not an idea of keeping them together; they are all over the place; the wheelers' reins are all loose on their backs. We seem to have an irresistible tendency toward bordering to the right which keeps us hovering over the ditch. However, fortunately, the road is very broad—one of the old coach-roads—and the vehicles we meet are few and anxious to get out of our way. Such as they are, I will do ourselves the justice to say that we try our best to run down each and all of them.

It is September, as I have before said. The leaves are still all green, only a stray bramble reddening here and there; but most of the midsummer hedge-row peoples are gathered to their rest. Only a lagging few, the slight-throated blue-bell, the uncouth ragwort, the little, tight scabious, remain. At least, the berries are here, however. While each red hip shows where a faint rose blossomed and fell; while the elder holds stoutly

aloft her flat, black clusters; while the briony clasps the hawthorn-hedge, we cannot complain. Not only the *main* things of Nature, but all her odds and ends, are so exceedingly fair and daintily wrought.

It is one of those days that look charming, when seen through the window; bright and sunny, with lights that fly, and shadows that pursue; but it is a very different matter when one comes to *feel* it. There is a bleak, keen wind, that sends the clouds racing through the heavens, and that blows right in our teeth; nearly strangling me by the violence with which it takes hold of my head.

There has been no rain for a week or two, and it is a chalky country. The dust is waltzing in white whirlwinds along the road. High up as we are, it reaches us, and thrusts its fine and choking powder up our noses.

"I suppose," say I, doubtfully, looking up at the shifting uncertainty of the heavens, and trying to speak in a sprightly tone, a feat which I find rather hard of accomplishment, with such a blast cutting my eyes, and making me gasp—"I suppose that it will not rain?"

"*Rain!* not it!" replies our coachman, with contemptuous cheerfulness.

"The glass was going down!" I say, humbly, "and I think I felt a drop just now!"

"*Impossible!* it *could* not rain with this wind."

He says this with such a jovial and robust certainty of scorn, that I am half inclined to distrust the sky's evidence—to disbelieve even in the big drop that so indisputably splashed into my eye just now. "But in case it *does* rain," continue I, pertinaciously, "I suppose that there is a house near, or some place where we can take refuge?"

"No, there is no house nearer than a couple of miles"—making the statement with the easiest composure—"but it will not rain."

"Perhaps"—say I, with a sinking heart—"there is a wood—trees?"

"Well, no, there is not much in the way of trees—except Scotch firs—there are plenty of them—it is a bare sort of place—that is the beauty of it, you know"—(with a tone of confident pride)—"there is a monstrously fine view from it!—one can see *seven* counties!"

"Yes," say I, faintly, "so I have heard!"

At this point, the old gentleman is understood to be bawling something from the back. By the utter morosity of Algy's face—faintly seen in the distance—I conjecture that it is a joke; and, by the chuckling agony of zest with which the old man is delivered of it, I further conclude that it is something slightly unclean, but, thanks to the wind, none of us overtake a word of it. The wind's spirits are rising. Its play is becoming even more and more boisterous. It would be difficult to imagine any thing disagreeabler than it is making itself; but perhaps it *will* keep off the rain. Thinking this, I try to bear its blows and buffets—its slaps on the face—its boxes on the ear—with greater patience. We have left the broad and safe high-road; Mr. Parker having, in an evil moment, bethought himself of a short-cut. We are, therefore, entangled in a labyrinth of cross-roads—finger-postless, guideless, solitary. *So* solitary, indeed, that we meet only one vacant boy of tender years, of whom, when we inquire the way, the wind absolutely refuses to allow us to hear a word of the broad Doric of his answer. At last—after many bold and stout declarations on the part of Mr. Parker, that he *will* not be beaten—that he knows the way as well as he does his A B C—and that he will find it if he stays till midnight—he is compelled, by the joint and miserable clamor of us all, to turn back—(a frightful process, as the road is narrow, and the coach will not lock)—to retrace our steps, and take up again the despised high-road, where we had left it. These manœuvres have naturally taken some time. It is three o'clock in the afternoon before we at length reach the great spread of desolate, broad moorland, which is our destination. For more than an hour, absolute silence has fallen upon us. Like poor Yorick, we are "quite, quite chapfallen!" Even the gallant old gentleman could not make a dirty jest if he were to be shot for it. Mr. Parker alone maintains his exasperating good spirits. We find Roger and Mrs. Huntley sitting on the heather waiting for us. There is a good deal of relief—as it seems to me—in the former's eye, as he sees us appear on the scene; and a good deal of another expression, as he watches the masterly manner in which we pull up: all the four horses floundering together on their haunches; the leaders, moreover, exhibiting a mysterious desire to turn round and look in the wheelers' faces.

"Here we are!" cries Mr. Parker, joyously; "I have brought you along capitally, have not I?—but I am afraid we are little late—eh, Mrs. Huntley? I hope we have not kept you long."

"*Is* it late?" she replies, with a smile and a fine hypocrisy—for she *looks* hungry—"I did not know; we have been quite happy!"

Roger has risen, and is coming to help me down, but I say, crossly, "Do not, please; Algy manages best!" Algy, however, has no intention of helping anybody down. He has helped *himself* down; and, without a word or a look to any of his fellow-travelers, has thrown himself down on the heather at Mrs. Huntley's feet, and is relieving his mind by audible animadversions on our late triumphal progress. I am therefore left to the tender mercies of the grooms; at least, I should have been, if Mr. Musgrave had not taken pity on me, and guided my uncertain feet and the petticoats, which Zephyr is doing his playful best to turn over my head, down the steep declivity of the ladder. This, as you may guess, does not help to restore my equanimity. However, I am down now, on firm ground; and, at least, we are rid of the dust. My eyes are still full of grit, but I suppose they will get over that. I turn them disconsolately about.

On a fine sunny day—with butterflies hovering over the heather-flowers, and bees sucking honey from the gorse—with little mild airs playing about, and a turquoise sky shining overhead—it might be a spot on which to lie and dream dreams of paradise; *but now!* The sun has finally retired, and hid his sulky face for the day; the heather is over; and, though the gorse is not, yet it gives no fragrance to the raw air. All over the great rolling expanse there is a heavy, leaden look, caught from the angry heavens above. The great clouds are gathering themselves together to battle; and the mighty wind, with nothing to check its progress, is sweeping over the great plain, and singing with eerie, loud mournfulness.

I shudder.

"Where are the Scotch firs?" (I say, querulously, to Mr. Parker, who by this time had joined me); "you said there were plenty of them! where are they?"

"*Where?*" (looking cheerfully round), "oh, *there!*" (pointing to where one lightning-riven little wreck bends its sickly head to the gale). "Ah! I see there is only *one*, after all. I thought there had been more."

My heart sinks. Is that one withered, scathed little stick to be our sole protection against the storm, so evidently quickly coming up?

"Fine view, is not it?" pursues my companion, not in the least perceiving my depression, and complacently surveying the prospect. "Of course it might have been clearer, but, after all, you get a very good idea of it."

I turn my faint eyes in the same direction as his. Down on the horizon the sullen rain-clouds are settling, and, to meet them, there stretches a dead, colorless flat, dotted with little round trees, little church-spires, little houses, little fields, little hedges—one of those mappy views, that lack even the beauties of a map—the nice pink and green and blue lines which so gayly define the boundaries of each county.

"Very extensive, is not it?" he says, proudly; "you know you can see—"

"Seven counties!" interrupt I, sharply, snapping the words out of his mouth. "Yes, I know; you told me."

The horses have been led away to the distant ale-house. The coach stands forlorn and solitary on the moor. Some of us, looking at the threatening aspect of the weather, have suggested that *we* too should make for shelter; but this suggestion is indignantly vetoed by Mr. Parker.

"*Rain!* not a bit of it! It is not *thinking* of raining! The wind! what is the matter with the wind? Nice and fresh! Much better than one of those muggy days, when you can hardly breathe!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE cloth is therefore laid, with the dead heather-flowers beneath it, and the low leaden sky above. As large stones as can be found have to be sought on the moorland road to weight it, and hinder our banquet from flying bodily away. It is at last spread—cold lamb, cold partridges, chickens, *mayonnaise*, cakes, pastry—they have just been arranged in their

defenseless nakedness under the eye of heaven, when the rain begins. And, when it begins, it begins to some purpose. It deceives us with no false hopes—no breakings in the serried clouds—with no flying glimpses of blue sky. Down it comes, straight, *straight* down, on the lamb, on the *mayonnaise*, splash into the bitter. Each of us seizes the viand dearest to his or her heart, and tries to shelter it beneath his or her umbrella. But in vain! The great slant storm reaches it under the puny defense. Even Mr. Parker has to change the *form* of his consolation, though not the spirit. He can no longer deny that it is raining; but what he now says is that it will not last—that it is only a shower—that he is very glad to see it come down so hard at first, as it is all the more certain to be soon over.

Nobody has the heart to contradict him, though everybody knows that it is a lie. Mrs. Huntley, at the first drop, had made for the coach, and now sits in it, serene and dry. Algy follows her, with a chicken and a champagne-bottle. I sit doggedly still, where I am, on the cold moor.

Roger has not spoken to me since my rude reception of him on arriving, but he now comes up to me.

"Had you not better follow her example?" he asks, speaking rather formally, and looking toward the coach, where, with smiling profile, and neat hair, my rival is sitting, reveling among the flesh-pots.

Something in the sight of her sleek, smooth tidiness, joined to the consciousness of my own miserable, blowsed disorder, stings me more even than the rain-drops are doing.

"Not I!" I answer, brusquely; "that is what I trust I shall never do!"

He passes by my sneer without notice.

"In this rain you will be drenched in two minutes."

"Après!"

"*Après!*" he repeats, impatiently, "*après?* you will catch your death of cold!"

"And you will be a widower!" reply I, with a bitter smile.

Barbara is as obstinate as I am. She, too, seems to prefer the spite of the elements to disturbing the *tête-à-tête* in the coach. Musgrave has made her as comfortable as he can, with her back against the poor little Scotch fir, and a plaid over both their heads.

The feast proceeds in solemn silence. Even if we had the heart to talk, the difficulty of making ourselves heard would quite check the inclination.

There are little puddles in all our plates—the bread and cakes are *pap*—the lamb is damp and flabby, and the *mayonnaise* is reduced to a sort of watery whey.

Mr. Parker is the only one who, under these circumstances, makes any attempt to pretend that we are enjoying ourselves.

"This is not so bad, after all," he says, still with that same unconquerable accent of joviality. He has to say it three times, and to put up his hands to his mouth like a speaking-trumpet, before any one hears him. When they do, "answer comes there none!"

I, indeed, am not in a position for conversation at the exact moment that the demand is made upon me. I have just come to the end of a long wrestle with my umbrella. It has at last got its wicked will, and has turned right inside out! All its whalebones are aspiring heavenward. It is transformed into a melancholy *cup*—like a great, ugly flower, on a bare stalk. I lay the remains calmly down beside me, and affront the blast and the tempest alone! I have a brown hat on—at least, it *was* brown when we set off—I am just wondering, therefore, with a sort of stupid curiosity, why the *rill* that so plenteously distills from its brim, and so madly races down my cold nose, should be *sky-blue*, when I perceive that Barbara has left her shelter, and her lover, and is standing beside me.

"Poor Nancy!" she says, with a softly compassionate laugh, "how wet you are! come under the plaid with me! you have no notion how warm it keeps one; and the tree, though it does not *look* much, saves one a bit, too—and Frank does not mind being wet—come quick!"

I am too wretched to object. No waterproof could stand the deluge to which mine has been subjected. My shoulder-blades feel moist and *sticky:* my hair is in little dismal ropes, and dreadful runlets are coursing down my throat, and under my clothes.

Without any remonstrance, I snuggle under the plaid with Barbara—with a little of the feeling of soothing and dependence with which, long ago, in the dear old dead days at home, I used, when I was a naughty child, or

a bruised child—and I was very often both—to creep to her for consolation.

Thanks to the wind, and to our proximity, we are able to talk without a fear of being overheard.

"You are wrong!" Barbara says, glancing first toward the coach, and then turning the serene and limpid gravity of her blue eyes on me; "you are making a mistake!"

I do not affect to understand her.

"*Am I?*" I say, indignantly; "I am doing nothing of the kind! it is only my own idea!—ask Algy!"

"*Algy!*" (with a little accent of scorn), "poor Algy!—he is in such a fit state for judging, is not he?"

We both involuntarily look toward him.

It is *his* turn now, and his morosity is exchanged for an equally uncomfortable hilarity. His cheeks are flushed; he is laughing loudly, and going in heavily for the champagne. The next moment he is scowling discourteously at his old host, who, with his poor old chuckle entirely drowned, and overcome by an endless sort of choking monotony of cough, is clambering on tottery old legs into the coach, to try and get his share of shelter.

We both laugh a little; and then Barbara speaks again.

"Nancy, I want to say something to you. Just now, I heard Roger ask whether there was a fly to be got at the public-house where the horses are put up, and it seems there *is;* and he has sent for it. You may think that it is for *her*, but it is not—it is for *you!* Will you promise me to go home in it, if he asks you?"

I am silent.

"Will you?" she repeats, taking hold of one of my froggy hands, while her eyes shine with a soft and friendly urgency; "you know you always used to take my advice when we were little—will you?"

Somehow, at her words, a little warmth of comfortable reassurance steals about my heart. At home she always used to be right: perhaps she is right now—perhaps *I* am wrong. I will be even better than her suggestion.

Roger is standing not far from us. The rain has drenched his beard and his heavy mustache: the great drops stand on his eyelashes, and on his straight brows. Perhaps I only imagine it, but to me he looks sad and out of heart. It is not the weather that makes him so, if he is. Much he cares for that!

I call him, "Roger!" My voice is small and low, and the wind is large and loud, but he hears me.

"Yes?" (turning at the sound with a surprised expression).

"May I go home in the fly?" I ask, impulsively, yet humbly, "I mean with—with *her!*" (a gulp at the pronoun), then, under the influence of a fear that he may think that I am driven by a hankering after creature comforts to this overture, I go on quickly, "it is not because I want to be kept dry—if I were to be dragged through the sea, I could not be wetter than I am—but if you wish—Barbara thought—Barbara said—"

I mumble off into shy incoherency.

"*Will* you?" he says, with a tone of eagerness and pleasure, which, if not real, is at least admirably feigned. "It is what I was just wishing to ask you, only" (laughing with a sort of constraint and a touch of bitterness) "I really was *afraid!*"

"Am I such a *shrew?*" I say, looking at him with a feeling of growing light-heartedness. "Ah! I always was!—was not I, Barbara?" Then, a moment after, in a tone that is almost gay, I say, "May Barbara come, too? is there room?"

"Of course!" he answers, readily; "surely, there is plenty of room for all!"

While the words are yet on his lips, while I am still smiling up at him, under the soaked tartan, there comes a voice from the coach.

"Roger!"

He obeys the summons. It is just five paces off, and I hear each of the slow and softly-enunciated words that follow.

"I hear that you have sent for a fly! how very thoughtful of you! did you ever forget *any thing*, I wonder? I was—no—not *dreading* my drive home; but now I am *quite* looking forward to it. Why did you not bring a pack of cards? we might have had a game of bézique."

"I think we have made another arrangement," he answers, quietly. "I think Nancy will be your companion instead of me."

"*Lady Tempest!*" (with a slight, but to me quite perceptible raising of eyebrows, and accenting of words).

"Yes, Nancy."

I can see her face, but not his. To my acutely-listening, sharply-jealous ears, there sounds a tone of faint and carefully-hidden annoyance in his voice. It seems to me, too, that her features would not dare to wear such an expression of open disappointment if they were not answered and meeting something in his. I therefore take my course. I jump up hastily, flinging off the plaid, and advance toward the interlocutors.

She is just saying, "Oh, I understand! very nice!" in a little, formal voice, when I break in.

"I am going to do nothing of the kind!" I cry, hurriedly. "I have altered my mind; I shall keep to the coach, that is" (with a nervous laugh, and a miserable attempt at coquetry), "if Mr. Parker is not tired of me."

This is the way in which I take Barbara's advice. The fly arrives presently, and the original pair depart in it. Roger neither looks at nor speaks to me again; in fact, he ignores my existence; although, under the influence of one of those speedy and altogether futile repentances which always follow hard on the heels of my tantrums, I have waylaid him once or twice in the hope that he would be induced to recognize it. But no! this time I have outdone myself. I have tried his patience a little too far. I am in disgrace.

It is long, *long* after their departure before *we* get under way. The grooms have either misunderstood Mr. Parker's directions, or are enjoying their mulled beer over the pot-house fire too much to be in any violent haste again to meet the raw air and the persisting deluge.

It is past six o'clock before the horses arrive on the ground; it is half-past before we are off.

And meanwhile Mr. Parker has been rivaling Algy in the ardor with which he calls in the aid of the champagne to keep out the wet. At each fresh tumbler his joviality goes up a step, until at length it reaches a pitch which produces an opposite effect on me, and engenders a depressed fright.

"Barbara," say I, in a low voice, when at length the moment of departure draws near, and only Musgrave is within ear-shot—"Barbara, has it struck you? do not you think he is rather—"

Barbara, however, is diffident of her own opinion, and repeats my question to her lover.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"Is he? I have not noticed him; nothing more likely; last time I saw him he was *flying!* It was in India, at a great pig-sticking meeting, and after dinner he got up to the top of a big mango-tree, and tried to *fly!* Of course he fell down, but he was so drunk that he was not in the least hurt."

Mr. Musgrave seems to think this an amusing anecdote; but we do not.

"Why do not *you* drive?" I ask, contrary to all my resolutions addressing my future brother-in-law, and indeed forgetting in my alarm that I had ever made such. I am reminded of it, however, by the look of gratification that flashes—for only one moment and is gone—but still flashes into the depths of his great dark eyes.

"It is so likely that he would let me!" he says, laughing.

"I would not mind so much if I were at the *back!*" I say piteously, turning to Barbara. "At the back one does not know what is coming, but on the box one sees whatever is happening."

"That is rather an advantage I think," she answers, laughing. "I do not mind; I will go on the box."

"Will you?" say I, eagerly. "*Do!* and I will take care of the old general at the back."

So it is settled. We are on the point of starting now. Mr. Parker is up and is already beginning to struggle with the hopeless muddle of his reins. I think we have perhaps done him an injustice; at all events, his condition is not at all what it must have been when he mounted the mango. Algy's morosity has returned tenfold, and he is performing the evolution familiarly known as "pulling your nose to vex your face." That is to say, he is standing about in the pouring rain utterly unprotected from it. He entirely declines to put on any mackintosh or overcoat. Why he does this, or how it punishes Mrs. Huntley, I cannot say, but so it is.

We are off at last. I, in accordance with my wishes, up at the back, facing the grooms; but not at all in accordance with my wishes, Mr. Musgrave, and not the old host, is my companion.

"This is all wrong!" I cry, with vexed abruptness, as I see who it is that is climbing

after me. "Where is the general? We settled that he—"

"I am afraid you will have to put up with me!" interrupts Musgrave, coldly, with that angry and mortified darkening of the whole face, and sudden contraction of the eyeballs that I used so well to know. "We could not make him hear; we all tried, but none of us could make him understand." So I have to submit.

Well, we are off now. The night is coming quickly down: it will be *quite* dark an hour sooner than usual to-night, so low does the great black cloud-curtain stoop to the earth's wet face. Ink above us, so close above us, too, that it seems as if one might touch it with lifted hand; ink around us; a great stretch of dull and sulky heather; and, maddening around us with devilish glee, hitting us, buffeting us, bruising us, taking away our breath, and making our eyelids smart, is a wind—such a wind! I should have laughed if any one had told me an hour ago that it would rise. I should have said it was impossible, and yet it certainly has.

The wind which turned my umbrella inside out was a zephyr compared to that which is now *thundering* round us. Sometimes, for one, for two false moments, it lulls (the lulls are almost awfuller than the whirlwind that follows them), then with gathered might it comes tearing, howling, whooping down on us again, gnashing its angry teeth; bellowing with a voice like ten million lost devils. And on its pinions what rain it brings; what stinging, lacerating, bitter rain! And now, to add to our misfortunes, to pile Pelion on Ossa, we *lose our way*. Mr. Parker cannot be persuaded to abandon the idea of the short-cut. The natural result follows.

If we were hopelessly bewildered—utterly at sea among the maze of lonely roads into which he has again betrayed us at high noon—what must we be now in the angry dark of the evening? This time we have to go into a field to turn, a field full of tussocks, which in the dark we are unable to see, and over which the horses flounder and stumble. However, now at length—now that we have wasted three-quarters of an hour, and that it is quite pitch dark—(I need hardly say that we have no lamps)—we have at length regained the blessed breadth of the high-road, and I think that not even our coachman, to whose faith most things seem possible, will attempt to leave it a second time. I give a sigh of relief.

"It is all plain sailing now!" Musgrave says, reassuringly.

"There is one bad turn," reply I, gloomily—"very bad, at the bottom of the village by the bridge."

We relapse into silence, and into our unnatural battle with the elements. I have to grasp my hat firmly with one hand, and the side of the coach with the other, to prevent being blown off. If my companion were any one else, I should grasp *him*.

We are only a mile and a half from our haven now; the turn I dread is nearing.

"Are you frightened?" asks Musgrave, in a pause of the storm.

"*Horribly!*" I answer.

I have forgotten Brindley Wood—have forgotten all the mischief he has done. I recollect only that he is human, and that we are sharing what seems to me a great and common peril.

"Do not be frightened!" he says, in an eager whisper—"you need not. I will take care of you!"

Even through all the preoccupation of my alarm something in his tone jars upon and angers me.

"*You* take care of me!" I cry, scornfully. "How could you? I wish you would not talk nonsense."

We have reached the turn now! Shall we do it? One moment of breathless anxiety. I set my teeth and breathe hard. No, we shall not! We turn too sharp, and do not take a wide-enough sweep. The coach gives a horrible lurch. One side of us is up on the hedge-bank!—we are going over! I give a little agonized yell, and make a snatch at Frank, while my fingers clutch his nearest hand with the tenacity of a devil-fish. If it were his hair, or his nose, I should equally grasp it. Then, somehow—to this moment I do not know how—we right ourselves. The grooms are down like a shot, pulling at the horses' heads, and in a second or two—how it is done I do not see, on account of the dark—but with many bumpings, and shouts and callings, and dreadful jolts, we come straight again, and I drop Frank's hand like a hot chestnut.

In ten minutes more we are briskly and safely trotting up to the hall-door. Before we reach it, I see Roger standing under the lit portico, with level hand shading his eyes, which are intently staring out into the darkness.

"All right?—nothing happened?" he asks, in a tone of the most poignant anxiety, almost before we have pulled up.

"All right!"—replies Barbara's voice, softly cheerful. "Are you looking for Nancy? She is at the back with Frank."

Roger makes no comment, but this time he does not offer to lift me down.

"Well, here we are!" cries Mr. Parker, coming beaming into the hall, with his mackintosh one great drip, laughing and rubbing his hands. "And though I say it that should not, there are not many that could have brought you home better than I have done to-night, and, I declare, in spite of the rain, we have not had half a bad day, have we?"

But we are all strictly silent.

CHAPTER XLVI.

" . . . . Peace, pray you, now,
No dancing more. Sing sweet, and make us mirth.
We have done with dancing measures; sing that song
You call the songs of love at ebb."

YESTERDAY it had seemed impossible that we could ever be dry again, and yet to-day we are. Even our hair is no longer in dull, discolored ropes. A night has intervened between us and our sufferings. We have at last got the sound of the hissing rain and the thunder of the boisterous wind out of our ears. We have all got colds more or less. I am among the *less;* for rough weather has never been an enemy to me, and at home I have always been used to splashing about in the wet, with the native relish of a young duck. Mrs. Huntley is (despite the fly) among the *more*. She does not appear until late—not until near luncheon-time. Her cold is in the head, the *safest* but unbecomingest place, producing, as I with malignant joy perceive, a slight thickening and swelling of her little thin nose, and a boiled-gooseberry air in her appealing eyes.

The old gentleman is—with the exception, perhaps, of Algy—the most dilapidated among us. He has not yet begun one anecdote, whose point was not smothered and effaced by that choking, goat-like cough. This is perhaps a gain to *us*, as one is not expected to laugh at a *cough;* nor does its *dénoûment* ever put one to the blush.

Mr. Parker has no cold at all, and has even had the shameless audacity to propose *another* expedition to-day. But we all rise in such loud and open revolt that he has perforce to withdraw his suggestion.

He must save his superfluous energy for the evening, when the neighbors are to come together, and we are to dance. This fact is news to most of us, and I think we hardly receive it with the elation he expects. There seems to be more of rheumatism than of dance in many of our limbs, and our united sneezes will be enough to drown the band. However, revolt in this case is useless. We must console ourselves with the notion that at least in a ballroom there can be neither rain nor wind—that we cannot lose our way or be upset, at least not in the sense which had such terror for us yesterday. Roger has gone over to Tempest on business, and is away all day. Mrs. Huntley sits by the fire, with a little fichu over her head, sipping a *tisane;* while Algy, in undisturbed possession, and with restored but feverish amiability, stretches his length on the rug at her feet, and looks injured if Barbara or I, or even the footman with coals, enters the room.

As the day goes on, there is not much to do; a new idea takes possession of Mr. Parker's active mind.

Why should not we all be in fancy-dress to-night? Well, not all of us, then—not his uncle, of course, nor Sir Roger, but any of us that liked. *Trouble!* Not a bit of it. Why, the ladies need only rouge a bit, and put some flour on their heads, and there they are; and, as for the men, there is a heap of old things up in the lumber-room that belonged to his great-grandfather, and among them there is sure to be something to fit everybody. If they do not believe him, they may come and see for themselves.

Such is the force of a strong will, that he actually carries off the deeply unwilling Musgrave to inspect his ancestor's wardrobe. At first we have treated his proposal only with

laughter, but he is so profoundly in earnest about it, and dwells with such eagerness on the advantage of the fact that not a soul among the company will recognize us—he can answer for *himself* at least—it is always by his *hair* (with a laugh) that people know *him*—that we at length begin to catch his ardor.

To tell truth, from the beginning the idea has approved itself to Barbara and me, only that we were ashamed to say so—carrying us back in memory as it does to the days when we dressed the Brat up in my clothes as *me*, and took in all the maid-servants. I think, too, that I have a little of the feeling of faint hope that inspired Balak when he showed Balaam the Israelites from a fresh point of view. Perhaps, in carmine cheeks and a snow-white head, I may find a little of my old favor in Roger's eyes.

Human wills are mostly so feeble and vacillating, that if one thorough-going determined one sticks to *any* proposition, however absurd, he is pretty sure to get the majority round to him in time; and so it is in the present case. Mr. Parker succeeds in making us all, willing and unwilling, promise to travesty ourselves. We are not to dress till after dinner; that is over now, and we are all adorning ourselves.

For once I am taking great pains, and—for a wonder—pleasant pains with my toilet. It is slightly delayed by a variety of unwonted interruptions—knocks at the door, voices of valets in interrogation, and dialogue with my maid.

"If you please, Mr. Musgrave wants to know has Lady Tempest done with the rouge?"

(There is only one edition of rouge, which is traveling from room to room.)

Five minutes more, another knock.

"If you please, Mr. Parker's compliments, and will Lady Tempest lend him a hair-pin to black his eyelashes?"

I am finished now, quite finished—metamorphosed. I have suffered a great deal in the process of powdering, as I fancy every one must have done since the world began; the powder has gone into my eyes, up my nose, down into my lungs. I have breathed it, and sneezed it, and swallowed it, but "*il faut souffrir pour être belle*," and I do not grumble; for I *am* belle! For once in my life I know what it feels like to be a pretty woman. My uninteresting flax hair is hidden. Above the lowness of my brow there towers a great white erection, giving me height and dignity, while high aloft a little cap of ancient lace and soft pink roses daintily perches. On my cheeks there is a vivid yet delicate color; and my really respectable eyes are emphasized and accentuated by the dark line beneath them. To tell you the truth, I cannot take my eyes off myself. It is *delightful* to be pretty! I am simpering at myself over my left shoulder and heartily joining in my maid's encomiums on myself, when the door opens, and Roger enters. For the first instant I really think that he does not recognize me. Then—

"*Nancy!*" he exclaims, in a tone of the most utter and thorough astonishment—"*is* it Nancy?"

"*Nancy*, at your service!" reply I, with undisguised elation, looking eagerly at him, with my blackened eyes, to see what he will say next.

"But—what—*has*—happened—to you?" he says, slowly, looking at me exhaustively from top to toe—from the highest summit of my floured head to the point of my buckled shoes. "What have you got yourself up like this for?"

"To please Mr. Parker," reply I, breaking into a laugh of excitement. "But I have killed two birds with one stone; I have pleased *myself*, too! Did you ever see any thing so nice as I look?" (unable any longer to wait for the admiration which is so justly my due).

"Not often!" he answers, with emphasis.

We had parted rather formally—rather *en délicatesse*—this morning, but we both seem to have forgotten this.

"I must not dance *much!*" say I, anxiously turning again to the glass, and closely examining my complexion—"must I?—or my rouge will *run!*"

After a moment—

"You must be sure to tell me if I grow to look at all *smeary*, and I will run up-stairs at once, and put some more on."

He is looking at me, with an infinite amusement, and also commendation, in his eyes.

"Why, Nancy," he says, smiling—"I had no idea that you were so vain!"

"No," reply I, bubbling over again into a shamefaced yet delighted laughter—"no more had I! But then I had no idea that I was so pretty, either."

My elation remains undiminished when I go down-stairs. Yes, even when I compare myself with Mrs. Huntley, for, *for once*, I have beaten her! I really think that there can be no two opinions about it! indeed, I have the greatest difficulty in refraining from asking everybody whether there can.

She is not in powder. Her hair, in its present color, is hardly dark enough to suit the high comb, and black-lace mantilla which she has draped about her head, and the red rose in her hair is hardly redder than the catarrh has made her eyelids. A cold always comes on more heavily at night; and no one can deny that her whole appearance is stuffy and choky, and that she speaks through her nose.

As for me, I am not sure that I do not beat even *Barbara*. At least, the idea has struck me; and, when she herself suggests, and with hearty satisfaction, and elation not inferior to my own, insists upon it, I do not think it necessary to contradict her.

None of the three young men have as yet made their appearance; and the guests are beginning quickly to arrive. All the neighbors—all the friends who are staying with the neighbors to shoot their partridges—some soldiers, some odds and ends, *bushels* of girls—there always are bushels of girls somehow; here they come, smiling, settling their ties, giving their skirts furtive kicks behind, as their different sex and costume bid them.

All the duties of reception fall upon the poor old gentleman, and drive him to futile wrath, and to sending off many loud and desperate messages to his truant heir. However, to do him justice, the poor old soul is hospitality itself, and treats his guests, not only to the best food, drink, and fiddling in his power, but also to all his primest anecdotes. No less than *three* times in the course of the evening do I hear him go through that remarkable tale of the doctor at Norwich, of the age of seventy-eight, and four fine children.

To my immense delight, hardly anybody recognizes me. Many people look *hard*—really *very* hard—at me, and I try to appear modestly unconscious.

We are all in the dancing-room. The sharp fiddles are already beginning to squeak out a gay galop, and I am tapping inpatient time with my foot to that brisk, emphasized music which has always seemed to Barbara and me exhilarating past the power of words to express.

I think that Roger perceives my eagerness, for he brings up a, to me, strange soldier, who makes his bow, and invites me.

I comply, with contained rapture, and off we fly. For I have pressingly consulted Roger as to whether I may, with safety to my complexion, take a turn or two, and he has replied strongly in the affirmative. He has, indeed, maintained that I may dance all night without seeing my rosy cheeks dissolve, but I know better.

The room is almost lined with mirrors. I can even perceive myself over my partner's shoulder as I dance. I can ascertain that my loveliness still continues.

How pleasant it is, after all, to be young! and how *delightful* to be pretty!

Does Barbara *always* feel like this? It seems to me as if I had never danced so lightly—on so admirably slippery and springy a floor, or with any one whose step suited mine better. His style of dancing is, indeed, very like Bobby's. I tell him so. This leads to an explanation as to who Bobby is, which makes us extremely friendly.

We are standing still for a moment or two to take breath—we are long-winded, and do not *often* do it; but still, once in a way, it is unavoidable—and everybody else is whirling and galloping, and prancing round us, like Bacchantes, or tops, or what you will, when, looking toward the door, I catch a glimpse of the three missing young men. They are dodging behind one another, and each nudging and pushing the other forward. Clearly, they are horribly ashamed of themselves; and from the little I see of them, *no wonder!*

"Here they are!" I cry, in a tone of excitement. "Look! do look!" for, having at length succeeded in urging Mr. Parker to the front, they are making their entry, hanging as close together as possible, and with an extremely hang-dog air.

My partner has opened his eyes and his mouth.

"*What* are they?" he says, in a tone of

extreme disapprobation. "*Who* are they? Are they *Christy Minstrels?*"

"Oh, do not!" cry I, in a choked voice, "I do not want to laugh, it will make them so angry—at least not Mr. Parker, but the others."

As I speak, they reach me, that is, Algy and Mr. Parker do. Musgrave has slunk into a corner, and sits there, glaring at whoever he thinks shows a disposition to smile in his direction.

I have done Mr. Parker an injustice in accrediting him with any *mauvaise honte*. On the contrary, he clearly glories in his shame.

"Not half so bad, after all, are they?" he says in a voice of loud and cheerful appeal to me, as he comes up. "I mean considering, of course, that they were not *meant* for one, they really do very decently, do not they?"

I have put up my fan to hide the irresistible contortions which lips and mouth are undergoing.

"Very!" I say, indistinctly.

Almost everybody has stopped dancing, and is staring with unaffected wonder at them. Their heads are heavily floured, and their cheeks rouged. They have also greatly overdone the burnt hair-pin, as a huge smouch of black under each of their eyes attests.

They have all three got painfully tight knee-breeches, white stockings, and enormously long, broad-skirted coats, embroidered in tarnished gold. Algy's is plum-color. The arms of all three are very, *very* tight. Had our ancestors indeed such skinny limbs, and such prodigious backs?

Algy is a tall young man, but the waist of his coat is somewhere about the calves of his legs. It has told upon his spirits; he looks supernaturally grave.

Mr. Parker is differently visited. He has an apparently unaccountable reluctance to turning his back to me. I put it down at first to an exaggerated politeness; but, when, at last, in walking away, he unavoidably does it, I no longer wonder at his unwillingness, as his coat-tails decline to meet within half a mile. His forefathers must have been oddly framed.

"*Poor fellows!*" says my partner, in a tone of the profoundest compassion, as he puts his arm round me, and prepares to whirl me again into the throng, "*how* I pity them! What on earth did they do it for?"

"Oh, I do not know," I reply; "for *fun*, I suppose!"

But I think that except in the case of Mr. Parker, who really enjoys himself, and goes about making jovial jests at his own expense, and asking everybody whether he is not immensely improved by the loss of his red hair, that there is not much fun in it.

Algy is as sulky and shamefaced as a dog with a tin kettle tied to his tail, and Mr. Musgrave has altogether disappeared.

The evening wears on. I forget my cheeks, and dance every thing. *How* I *am* enjoying myself! Man after man is brought up to me, and they all seem pleased with me. At many of the things I say, they laugh heartily, and I do not wonder—even to myself my speeches sound pleasant. What a comfort it is that, for once in his life, Roger may be honestly proud of me! And he is.

It is surely pride, and also something better and pleasanter than pride, that is shining in the smile with which he is watching me from the door-way. At least, during the first part of the evening he *was* watching me.

"Is not he still? I look round the room. No, he is not here! he has disappeared! By a sudden connection of ideas I turn my eyes in search of the high comb and mantilla. Neither are they here. Last time I saw them, they were sitting on the stairs, pathetically observing to their companion how hard it was that one might not feel cool without looking as if one were flirting.

Perhaps they are on the stairs still; perhaps she has gone to bed as she threatened. Somehow my heart misgives me. I become rather absent; my partners grow seldomer merry at my speeches. Even my feet feel to fly less lightly, and I forget to look at myself in the glass. Then it strikes me suddenly, that I will not dance any more. The sparkle seems to have gone out of the evening since I missed Roger's face from the door-way.

I decline an overture on the part of my first friend to trip a measure with me—we have already tripped several—and, by the surprise and slight mortification which I read on his face as he turns away, I think I must have done it with some abruptness.

I decline everybody. I stand in the door-way, whence I can command both the ball-

room and the passages. They are not on the stairs.

A moment ago Mr. Parker came up to me and told me in his gay, loud voice how much he would like to have a valse with me, but that his clothes are so tight, he really *dare not.* Then he disappears among the throng, with an uncomfortable sidelong movement, which endeavors to shield the incompleteness of his back view.

I am still smiling at his dilemma, when another voice sounds in my ears.

"You are not dancing?"

It is Musgrave. He has had the vanity to take off his absurd costume, and to wash the powder from his hair, and the rouge from his cheeks. He stands before me now, cool, pale, and civilized, in the faultless quietness of his evening dress.

"No," reply I, shortly, "I am not!"

"Will you dance with me?"

I am not looking at him; indeed, I never look at him now, if I can help; but I hear a sort of hesitating defiance in his tone.

"No, thank you"—(still more shortly)—"I might have danced, if I had liked: it is not for want of asking"—(with a little childish vanity)—"but I do not wish."

"Do not you mean to dance any more this evening, then?"

"I do not know; that is as may be!"

I have almost turned my back upon him, and my eyes are following—not perhaps quite without a movement of envy—my various acquaintances, scampering, coupled in mad embraces. I think that he is gone, but I am mistaken.

"Will you at least let me take you in to supper?" in a tone whose formality is strongly dashed with resentment.

I wish that I did not know his voice so hatefully well: all its intonations and inflections are as familiar to me as Roger's.

"I do not want any supper," I answer, petulantly, turning the back of my head and all my powdered curls toward him; "I never eat supper at a ball; I like to stand here; I like to watch the people — to watch Barbara!"

This at least is true. To see Barbara dance has always given, and does even now give, me the liveliest satisfaction. No one holds her head so prettily as Barbara; no one moves so smoothly, and with so absolutely innocent a gayety. The harshest, prudishest adversary of valsing, were he to see Barbara valse, would be converted to thinking it the most modest of dances. Mr. Musgrave is turning away. Just as he is doing so, an idea strikes me. Perhaps they are in the supper-room.

"After all," say I, unceremoniously, and forgetting for the moment who it is that I am addressing, "I do not mind if I do have something; I—I—am rather hungry."

I put my hand on his arm, and we walk off.

The supper-room is rather full—(when indeed, was a supper-room known to be empty?)—some people are sitting—some standing—it is therefore a little difficult to make out who is here, and who is not. In total absolute forgetfulness of the supposed cause that has brought me here, I stand eagerly staring about, under people's arms—over their shoulders. So far, I do not see them. I am recalled by Mr. Musgrave's voice, coldly polite.

"Will not you sit down?"

"No, thank you," reply I, bending my neck back to get a view behind an intervening group; "I had rather stand."

"Are you looking for any one?"

Again I wish that I did not know his voice so well—that I did not so clearly recognize that slightly guardedly malicious intonation.

"Looking for any one?" I cry, sharply, and reddening even through my rouge—"of course not!—whom should I be looking for?—but, after all, I do not think I care about having any thing!—there's—there's nothing that I fancy."

This is a libel at once upon myself and on General Parker's hospitality. He answers nothing, and, perhaps, the smile, almost imperceptible—which I fancy in his eyes, and in the clean curve of his lips—exists only in my imagination. He again offers me his arm, and I again take it. I have clean forgotten his existence. His arm is no more to me than if it were a piece of wood.

"Where are they? where can they be?" is the thought that engrosses all my attention.

I hardly notice that he is leading me away from the ballroom—down the long corridor,

on which almost all the sitting-rooms open. They are, one and all, lit up to-night; and, in each of them, there are guests. I glance in at the drawing-room: they are not there! We take a turn in the conservatory. We find Mr. Parker sitting very carefully upright, for his costume does not allow of any lolling, or of any tricks being played with it under a magnolia, with a pretty girl—(I wonder, have *my* cheeks grown as streaky as his?)—but they are not there. We go back to the corridor. We peep into the library: two or three bored old gentlemen—martyrs to their daughters' prospects—yawning over the papers and looking at their watches. They are not here. Where *can* they be? Only one room yet remains—one room at the very end of the passage—the billiard-room, shut off by double doors to deaden the sound of the balls. One of the double doors is wide open, the other closed — not absolutely *shut*, but not ajar. Musgrave pushes it, and we look in. I do not know why I do. I do not expect to see any one. I hardly think it will be lit, probably blank darkness will meet us. But it is not so. The lamps above the table are shining subduedly under their green shades; and on a couch against the wall two people are sitting. They *are* here. I found them at last.

Evidently, they are in deep and absorbing talk. Roger's elbow rests on the top of the couch. His head is on his hand. On his face there is an expression of grave and serious concern; and she—she—is it *possible?*—she is evidently—plainly weeping. Her face is hidden in her handkerchief, and she is sobbing quietly, but quite audibly. In an instant, with ostentatious hurry, Musgrave has reclosed the door, and we stand together in the passage.

I am not mistaken now: I could not be: that can be no other expression than triumph that so darkly shines in his great and eager eyes.

"You *knew* they were there!" I cry, in a whisper of passionate resentment, snatching my hand from his arm; "you brought me here *on purpose!*"

Then, regardless of appearances, I turn quickly away, and walk back down the passage alone!

CHAPTER XLVII.

This is how the ball ends for me. As soon as I am out of sight, I quicken my walk into a run, and, flying up the stairs, take refuge in my bedroom. Nor do I emerge thence again. The ball itself goes on for hours. The drawing-room is directly beneath me. It seems to me as if the sound of the fiddling, of the pounding, scampering feet would never, never end.

I believe, at least, I hear afterward, that Mr. Parker, whose spirits go on rising with the steady speed of quicksilver in fine weather, declines to allow his guests to depart, countermands their carriages, bribes their servants, and, in short, reaches the pitch of joyfully-confident faith to which all things seem not only *possible*, but extremely desirable, and in whose eyes the mango-tree feat would appear but a childish trifle.

The room is made up for the night; windows closed, shutters bolted, curtains draped. With hasty impatience I undo them all. I throw high the sash, and lean out. It is not a warm night; there is a little frosty crispness in the air, but I am *burning*. I am talking quickly and articulately to myself all the time, under my breath; it seems to me to relieve a little the inarticulate thoughts. I will not wink at it any longer, indeed I will not; nobody could expect it of me. I will not be taken in by that transparent fallacy of old friends! Nobody but me is. They *all* see it; Algy, Musgrave, all of them. At the thought of the victory written in Musgrave's eyes just now—at the recollection of the devilish irony of his wish, as we parted in Brindley Wood—

"I hope that your fidelity may be rewarded as it deserves—"

I start up, with a sort of cry, as if I had been smartly stung, and begin to walk quickly up and down the room. I will not storm at Roger—no, I will not even raise my voice, if I can remember, and, after all, there is a great deal to be said on his side; he has been very forbearing to me always, and I—I have been trying to him; most petulant and shrewish; treating him to perpetual, tiresome tears, and peevish, veiled reproaches. I will only

ask him quite meekly and humbly to let me go home again; to send me back to the changed and emptied school-room; to Algy's bills and morosities; to the wearing pricks of father's little pin-point tyrannies.

I have lit the candles, and am looking at myself in the cheval-glass. What has become of my beauty, pray? The powder is shaken from my hair; it no longer rises in a white and comely pile; the motion of dancing has loosened and tossed it; it has a look of dull, gray dishevelment. The rouge has almost disappeared; melted away, or sunk in; there never was a great deal of it, never the generous abundance that adorned Mr. Parker's face. I cannot help laughing, even now, as I think of the round, red smouch that so artlessly ornamented each of his cheeks.

I neither ring for my maid nor attempt to undress myself. I either keep walking restlessly to and fro, or I sit by the casement, while the cold little wind lifts my dusty hair or blows against my hot, stiff eyes, or I stand stupidly before the glass bitterly regarding the ruins of my one night's fairness. I do not know for how long; it must be hours, but I could not say how many.

The fiddles' shrill voices grow silent at last; the bounding and stamping ceases; the departing carriage-wheels grind and crunch on the gravel drive. I shall not have much longer to wait; he will be coming soon now. But there is yet another interval. In ungovernable impatience, I open my door and listen. It seems to me that there reaches me from the hall the sound of voices in loud and angry altercation; it is too far off for me to distinguish to whom they belong. Then there is silence again, and then at last—at last Roger comes. I hear his foot along the passage, and run to the door to intercept him, on his way to his dressing-room. He utters an exclamation of surprise on seeing me.

"Not in bed yet? Not undressed? They told me that you were tired and had gone to bed hours ago!"

"Did they?"

I can say only these two little words. I am panting so, as if I had run hard. We are both in the room now, and the door is shut. I suppose I look odd; wild and gray and haggard through the poor remains of my rouge.

"You are late," I say presently, in a voice of low constraint, "are not you? everybody went some time ago."

"I know," he answers, with a slight accent of irritation; "it is Algy's fault! I do not know what has come to that boy; he hardly seems in his right mind to-night; he has been trying to pick a quarrel with Parker, because he lit Mrs. Huntley's candle for her."

"Yes," say I, breathing short and hard. Has not he himself introduced her name?

"And you know Parker is always ready for a row—loves it—and as he is as screwed to-night as he well can be, it has been as much as we could do to make them keep their hands off each other!" After a moment he adds: "Silly boy! he has been doing his best to fall out with *me*, but I would not let him compass that."

"Has he?"

Roger has begun to walk up and down, as I did a while ago; on his face a look of unquiet discontent.

"It was a mistake his coming here this time," he says, with a sort of anger, and yet compassion, in his tone. "If he had had a grain of sense, he would have staid away!"

"It is a thousand pities that you cannot send us *all* home again!" I say, with a tight, pale smile—"send us packing back again, Algy and Barbara and *me*—replace me on the wall among the broken bottles, where you found me."

My voice shakes as I make this dreary joke.

"Why do you say that?" he cries, passionately. "Why do you *torment* me? You know as well as I do, that it is impossible—out of the question! You know that I am no more able to free you than—"

"You *would*, then, if you *could?*" cry I, breathing short and hard. "You *own* it!"

For a moment he hesitates; then—

"Yes," he says firmly, "I would! I did not think at one time that I should ever have lived to say it, but I *would*."

"You are at least candid," I answer, with a sort of smothered sob, turning away.

"Nancy!" he cries, following me, and taking hold of my cold and clammy hands, while what *looks*—what, at least, I should have once said *looked*—like a great yearning fills his kind and handsome eyes; "we are not very happy, are we? perhaps, child, we never

shall be now—often I think so. Well, it cannot be helped, I suppose. We are not the first, and we shall not be the last!" (with a deep and bitter sigh). "But indeed, I think, dear, that we are unhappier than we need be."

I shrug my shoulders with a sort of careless despair.

"Do you think so? I fancy not. Some people have their happiness thinly spread over their whole lives, like bread-and-scrape!" I say, with a homely bitterness. "Some people have it in a *lump!* that is all the difference! I had mine in a *lump*—all crowded into nineteen years that is, nineteen *very good years!*" I end, sobbing.

He still has hold of my hands. His face is full of distress; indeed, distress is too weak a word—of acute and utter pain.

"What makes you talk like this *now*, to-night?" he asks, earnestly. "I have been deceiving myself with the hope that you were having *one* happy evening, as I watched you dancing—did you see me? I dare say not—of course you were not thinking of me. You looked like the old light-hearted Nancy that lately I have been thinking was gone forever!"

"Did I?" say I, dejectedly, slowly drawing my hands from his, and wiping my wet eyes with my pocket-handkerchief.

"*Any one* would have said that you were enjoying yourself," he pursues, eagerly—"*were* not you?"

"Yes," say I, ruefully, "I was very much." Then, with a sudden change of tone to that sneering key which so utterly—so unnaturally misbecomes me—"And *you?*"

"*I!*" He laughs slightly. "I am a little past the age when one derives any very vivid satisfaction from a ball; and yet," with a softening of eye and voice, "I liked looking at you too!"

"And it was pleasant in the billiard-room, was not it?" say I, with a stiff and coldly ironical smile—"so quiet and shady."

"*In the billiard-room?*"

"Do you mean to say," cry I, my factitious smile vanishing, and flashing out into honest, open passion, "that you mean to deny that you were there?"

"Deny it!" he echoes, in a tone of the deepest and most displeased astonishment; "of course not! Why should I? What would be the object? And if there *were* one—have *I* ever told *you* a lie?" with a reproachful accent on the pronouns. "I was there half an hour, I should think."

"And why were you?" cry I, losing all command over myself. "What business had you? Were not there plenty of other rooms—rooms where there were lights and people?"

"Plenty!" he replies, coldly, still with that look of heavy displeasure; "and for my part I had far rather have staid there. I went into the billiard-room because Mrs. Huntley asked me to take her. She said she was afraid of the draughts anywhere else."

"Was it the *draughts* that were making her cry so bitterly, pray?" say I, my eyes—dry now, achingly dry—flashing a wretched hostility back into his. "I have heard of their making people's eyes run indeed, but I never heard of their causing them to sob and moan."

He has begun again to tramp up and down, and utters an exclamation of weary impatience.

"How could I help her crying?" he asks, with a tired irritation in his tone. "Do you think I *enjoyed* it? I *hate* to see a woman weep! it makes me *miserable!* it always did; but I have not the slightest objection—why, in Heaven's name, should I?—to tell you the cause of her tears. She was talking to me about her child."

"Her *child!*" repeat I, in an accent of the sharpest, cuttingest scorn. "And you were taken in! I knew that she made capital out of that child, but I thought that it was only neophytes like Algy, for whose benefit it was trotted out! I thought that *you* were too much of a man of the world, that she knew *you* too well—" I laugh, derisively.

"Would you like to know the true history of the little Huntley?" I go on, after a moment. "Would you like to know that its grandmother, arriving unexpectedly, found it running wild about the lanes, a little neglected heathen, out at elbows, and with its frock up to its knees, and that she took it out of pure pity, Mrs. Zéphine not making the slightest objection, but, on the contrary, being heartily glad to be rid of it—do you like to know *that?*"

"How do *you* know it?" (speaking quickly)—"how did *you* hear it?"

"I was told."

"But *who* told you?"

"That is not of the slightest consequence."

"I wish to know."

"Mr. Musgrave told me."

I can manage his name better than I used, but even now I redden. For once in his life, Roger, too, sneers as bitterly as I myself have been doing.

"Mr. Musgrave seems to have told you a good many things."

This is carrying the war into the enemy's quarters, and so I feel it. For the moment it shuts my mouth.

"Who is it that has put such notions into your head?" he asks, with gathering excitement, speaking with rapid passion. "*Some one* has! I am as sure as that I stand here that they did not come there themselves. There was no room for such suspicions in the pure soul of the girl I married."

I make no answer.

"If it were not for the *misery* of it," he goes on, that dark flush that colored his bronzed face the other night again spreading over it, "I could *laugh* at the gross absurdity of the idea! To begin such fooleries at *my* age! Nancy, Nancy!" his tone changing to one of reproachful, heart-rending appeal—"has it never struck you that it is a little hard, considering all things, that *you* should suspect *me?*"

Still I am silent.

"Tell me what you wish me to do!" he cries, with passionate emphasis. "Tell me what you wish me to leave undone! You are a little hard upon me, dear: indeed you are—some day I think that you will see it—but it was not your own thought! I know that as well as if you had told me! It was suggested to you—*by whom* you best know, and whether his words or mine are most worthy of credit!"

He is looking at me with a fixed, pathetic mournfulness. There is in his eyes a sort of hopelessness and yet patience.

"We are *miserable*, are not we?" he goes on, in a low voice—"*most* miserable! and it seems to me that every day we grow more so, that every day there is a greater dissonance between us! For my part, I have given up the hope that we can ever be happier! I have wondered that I should have entertained it. But, at least, we might have *peace!*"

There is such a depth of depression, such a burden of fatigue in his voice, that the tears rise in my throat and choke the coming speech.

"At least you are undeceived about me, are not you?" he says, looking at me with an eager and yet almost confident expectation. "At least you believe me?"

But I answer nothing. It is the tears that keep me dumb, but I think that he thinks me still unconvinced, for he turns away with a groan.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I made a posy while the day ran by,
Here will I smell my remnant out, and tie
My life within this band;
But Time did beckon to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away,
And withered in my hand!"

We are home again now; we have been away only three days after all, but they seem to me like three years—three disastrous years—so greatly during them has the gulf between Roger and me widened and deepened. Looking back on what it was before that, it seems to me now to have been but a shallow and trifling ditch, compared to the abyss that it is now. We left Mr. Parker standing at the hall-door, his red hair flaming bravely in the morning sun, loudly expressing his regret at our departure, and trying to extract an unlikely promise from us that we will come back next week.

During the drive home we none of us hardly speak. Roger and I are gloomily silent, Barbara sympathetically so. Barbara has the happiest knack of being in tune with every mood; she never jostles with untimely mirth against any sadness. I think she sees that my wounds are yet too fresh and raw to bear the gentlest handling, so she only pours upon them the balm of her tender silence. There is none of the recognized and allowed selfishness of a betrothed pair about Barbara. Sometimes I almost forget that she *is* engaged, so little does she ever bring herself into the foreground: and yet, if it were not for us, I think that to-day she could well find in her heart to be mirthful.

After all is said and done, I *still* love Barbara. However much the rest of my life has turned to Dead Sea apples, I still love Barbara; and, what is more, I shall always love her now. Is not she to live at only a stone's-throw from me? I do not think that I am of

a very gushing nature generally, but as I think these thoughts I take hold of her slight hand and give it a long squeeze. Somehow the action consoles me.

Two more days pass. It is morning again, and I am sitting in my boudoir, doing nothing (I never seem to myself to do any thing now), and listlessly thinking how yellow the great horse-chestnut in the garden is turning, and how kindly and becomingly Death handles all leaves and flowers, so different from the bitter spite with which he makes havoc of *us*, when Roger enters. It surprises me, as it is the first time that he has done it since our return.

We are on the formalest terms now; perhaps so best; and, if we have to address each other, do it in the shortest little icy phrases. When we are *obliged* to meet, as at dinner, etc., we both talk resolutely to Barbara. He does not look icy now; disturbed rather, and anxious. He has an open note in his hand.

"Nancy," he says, coming quickly up to me, "did you know that Algy was at Laurel Cottage?"

"Not I!" I answer, tartly. "He does not favor me with his plans; tiresome boy. He is more bother than he is worth."

"Hush!" he says, hastily yet gently. "Do not say any thing against him; you will be sorry if you do. He is *ill*."

"*Ill!*" repeat I, in a tone of consternation, for among us it is a new word, and its novelty is awful. "What is the matter with him?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, I snatch the note from his hand. I do not know to this day whether he meant me to read it or not, but I think he *did*, and glance hastily through it. I am well into it before I realize that it is from my rival.

"My dear Roger:

"My hand is trembling so much that I can hardly hold the pen, but, *as usual*, in my troubles, I turn to you. Algy Grey is here. You, who always understand, will know how much against my will his coming was, but he *would* come; and you know, poor fellow, how headstrong he is! I am grieved to tell you that he was taken ill this morning; I sadly fear that it is this wretched low fever that is much about. It makes me *miserable* to leave him! If I consulted my own wishes, I need not tell *you* that I should stay and nurse him; but alas! I know by experience the sharpness of the world's tongue, and in my situation I dare not brave it; nor would it be fair upon Mr. Huntley that I should. Ah! what a different world it would be if one might follow one's own impulses! but one may not, and so I am leaving at once. I shall be gone before this reaches you."

I throw the letter down on the floor with a gesture of raging disgust.

"Gone!" I say, with flashing eyes and lifted voice; "is it possible that, after having decoyed him there, she is leaving him now to die, *alone?*"

"So it seems," he answers, looking back at me with an indignation hardly inferior to my own. "I could not have believed it of her."

"He will die!" I say a moment after, forgetting Mrs. Huntley, and breaking into a storm of tears. "I *know* he will! I always said we were too prosperous. Nothing has ever happened to us. None of us have ever gone! I *know* he will die; and I said yesterday that I liked him the least of all the boys. Oh, I *wish* I had not said it.—Barbara! Barbara! I *wish* I had not said it."

For Barbara has entered, and is standing silently listening. The roses in her cheeks have paled, indeed, and her blue eyes look large and frightened; but, unlike me, she makes no crying fuss. With noiseless dispatch she arranges every thing for our departure. Neither will she hear of Algy's dying. He will get better. We will go to him at once—all three of us—and will nurse him so well that he will soon be himself again; and whatever happens (with a kindling of the eye, and godly lightening of all her gentle face), is not *God* here—God *our friend?* This is what she keeps saying to me in a soft and comforting whisper during our short transit, with her slight arm thrown round me as I sob in helpless wretchedness on her shoulder. It is very foolish, very childish of me, but I cannot get it out of my head, that I said I liked him the least. It haunts me still when I stand by his bedside, when I see his poor cheeks redder than mine were when they wore their rouge, when I notice the hot drought of his parched lips. It haunts me still with disproportioned remorse through all the weeks of his illness.

For the time stretches itself out to weeks —abnormal, weary weeks, when the boundaries of day and night confound themselves—when each steps over into his brother's territories—when it grows to feel natural, wakefully, to watch the candle's ghostly shadows, flickering at midnight, and to snatch fitful sleeps at noon! to watch the autumnal dawns coldly breaking in the gloom of the last, and to have the stars for companions.

His insane exposure of himself to the rage of the storm, on the night of the picnic, has combined, with previous dissipation, to lower his system so successfully as to render him an easy booty to the low, crawling fever, which, as so often in autumn, is stealing sullenly about, to lay hold on such as through any previous cause of weakness are rendered the more liable to its attacks. Slowly it saps the foundations of his being.

But Algy has always loved life, and had a strong hold on it; neither will he let go his hold on it now, without a tough struggle; and so the war is long and bitter, and we that fight on Algy's side are weak and worn out.

Sometimes the silence of the night is broken by the boy's voice calling strongly and loudly for Zéphine. Often he mistakes me for her—often Barbara—catches our hands and covers them with insane kisses.

Sometimes he appeals to her by the most madly tender names—names that I think would surprise Mr. Huntley a good deal, and perhaps not altogether please him; sometimes he alludes to past episodes—episodes that perhaps would have done as well to remain in their graves.

On such occasions I am dreadfully frightened, and very miserable; but all the same, I cannot help glancing across at Roger, with a sort of triumph in my eyes—sort of *told-you-so* expression, from which it would have required a loftier nature than mine to refrain.

And so the days go on, and I lose reckoning of time. I could hardly tell you whether it were day or night.

My legs ache mostly a good deal, and I feel dull and drowsy from want of sleep. But the brunt of the nursing falls upon Barbara.

When he was well—even in his best days —Algy was never very reasonable—very considerate—neither, you may be sure, is he so now.

It is always Barbara, Barbara, for whom he is calling. God knows I do my best, and so does Roger. No most loving mother could be gentler, or spare himself less, than he does; but somehow we do not content him.

It is not to every one that the gift of nursing is vouchsafed. I think I am clumsy. Try as I will, my hands are not so quick and light and deft as hers—my dress rustles more, and my voice is less soothing.

And so it is always "Barbara! Barbara!" And Barbara is always there—always ready.

The lovely flush that outdid the garden-flowers has left her cheeks indeed, and her eyelids are drooped and heavy; but her eyes shine with as steady a sweetness as ever; for God has lit in them a lamp that no weariness can put out.

Sometimes I think that if one of the lovely spirits that wait upon God in heaven were sent down to minister here below, he would not be very different in look and way, and holy tender speech, from our Barbara.

Whether it be through her nursing, or by the strength of his own constitution, and the tenacious vitality of youth, or, perhaps, the help of all three, Algy pulls through.

I think he has looked Death in the face, as nearly as any one ever did without falling utterly into his cold embrace, but he pulls through.

By very slow, small, and faltering steps, he creeps back to convalescence. His recovery is a tedious business, with many tiresome checks, and many ebbings and flowings of the tide of life; but—he lives. Weak as any little tottering child—white as the sheets he lies on; with prominent cheek-bones, and great and languid eyes, he is given back to us.

Life, worsted daily in a thousand cruel fights, has gained one little victory. To-day, for the first time, we all three at once leave him—leave him coolly and quietly asleep, and dine together in Mrs. Huntley's little dusk-shaded dining-room.

We are quite a party. Mother is here, come to rejoice over her restored first-born son; the Brat is here; he has run over from Oxford. Musgrave is here. I am in such spirits; I do not know what has come to me. It seems to me as if I were newly born into a fresh and altogether good and jovial world.

Not even the presence of Musgrave lays any constraint upon my spirits.

For the first time since the dark day in Brindley Wood, I meet him without embarrassment. I answer him: I even address him now and then.

All the small civilizations of life—the flower-garnished table; the lamps softly burning; the evening-dresses (for the first time we have dressed for dinner)—fill me with a keen pleasure, that I should have thought such little etceteras were quite incapable of affording.

I seem as if I could not speak without broad smiles. I am tired, indeed, still, and my eyes are heavy. But what does that matter? Life has won! Life has won! We are still all six here!

"Nancy!" says the Brat, regarding me with an eye of friendly criticism, "I think you are *cracked* to-night!—Do you remember what our nurses used to tell us? 'Much laughing always ends in much crying.'"

But I do not heed: I laugh on. Barbara is not nearly so boisterously merry as I, but then she never is. She is more overdone with fatigue than I, I think; for she speaks little—though what she does say is full of content and gladness—and there are dark streaks of weariness and watching under the serene violets of her eyes. She is certainly very tired; as we go to bed at night she seems hardly able to get up the stairs, but leans heavily on the banisters—one who usually runs so lightly up and down.

Yes, *very* tired, but what of that? it would be unnatural, *most* unnatural if she were not; she will be all right to-morrow, after a good long night's rest—yes, all right. I say this to her, still gayly laughing as I give her my last kiss, and she smiles and echoes, "All right!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

"So mayst thou die, as I do! fear and pain
Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!"

All right! Yes, for Barbara it *is* all right. Friends, I no more doubt that than I doubt that I am sitting here now, with the hot tears on my cheeks, telling you about it; but oh! not—*not* for us!

"Much laughing will end in much crying." The Brat was right. God knows the old saw has come true enough in my case. I exulted too soon. Too soon I said that the all-victor was vanquished. He might have left us our one little victory, might not he?—knowing that at best it was but a reprieve, that soon or late—soon or late, Algy—we all, every human flower that ever blossomed out in this world's sad garden, must be embraced in the icy iron of his arms.

I always said that we were too many and too prosperous; long ago I said it. I always wondered that he had so long overlooked us. And now that he comes, he takes our choicest and best. With nothing less is he content. Barbara sickens. Not until the need for her tender nursing is ended, not until Algy can do without her, does she go; and then she makes haste to leave us.

On the morning after my mad and premature elation, it is but too plain that the fever has laid hold of her too, and in its parching, withering clasp, our unstained lily fades. We take her back to Tempest at her wish, and there she dies—yes, *dies*.

Somehow, I never thought of Barbara dying. Often I have been nervous about the boys; out in the world, exposed to a hundred dangers and rough accidents, but about Barbara—*never*, hardly more than about myself, safely at home, scarcely within reach of any probable peril. And now the boys are all alive and safe, and Barbara is going. One would think that she had cared nothing for us, she is in such a hurry to be gone; and yet we all know that she has loved us well—that she loves us still—none better.

Alas! we have no long and tedious nursing of her. She has never given any trouble in her life, and she gives none now. Almost before we realize the reality and severity of her sickness, she is gone. Neither does she make any struggle. She never was one to strive or cry; never loud, clamorous, and self-asserting, like the boys and me: she was always most meek, and with a great meekness she now goes forth from among us—meekness and yet valor, for with a full and collected consciousness she looks in the face of Him from whom the nations shuddering turn away their eyes, and puts her slight hand gently into his, saying, "Friend, I am ready!"

And the days roll by; *but* few, *but* few of them, for, as I tell you, she goes most quickly, and it comes to pass that our Barbara's death-day dawns. Most people go in the morning. God grant that it is a good omen, that for them, indeed, the sun is rising!

We are all round her—all we that loved her and yet so lightly—for every trivial thing called upon her, and taxed her, and claimed this and that of her, as if she were some certain common thing that we should always have within our reach. Yes, we are all about her, kneeling and standing in a hallowed silence, choking back our tears that they may not stain the serenity of her departure.

Musgrave is nearest her; her hand is clasped in his; even at this sacred and supreme moment a pang of most bitter earthly jealousy contracts my heart that it should be so. What is he to her? what has he to do with our Barbara?—*ours, not his, not his!* But it pleases her.

She has never doubted him. Never has the faintest suspicion of his truth dimmed the mirror of her guileless mind, nor will it ever now. She goes down to the grave smiling, holding his hand, and kissing it. Now and then she wanders a little, but there is nothing painful or uneasy in her wanderings.

Her fair white body lies upon the bed, but by the smile that kindles all the dying loveliness of her face, by the happy broken words that fall from her sweet mouth, we know that she is already away in heaven. Now and again her lips part as if to laugh—a laugh of pure pleasantness.

"As the man lives, so shall he die!" As Barbara has lived, so does she die—meekly, unselfishly—with a great patience, and an absolute peace. O wise man! O philosophers! who would take from us—who have all but taken from us—our Blessed Land, the land over whose borders our Barbara, at that smile, seems setting her feet—you *may* be right—I, for one, know not! I am weary of your pros and cons! But when you take it away, for God's sake give us something better instead!

Who, while they kneel, with the faint hand of their life's life in theirs, can be satisfied with the *probability* of meeting again? God! God! give us *certainty*.

The night has all but waned, the dawn has come. God has sent his messenger for Barbara. An awful hunger to hear her voice once more seizes me, *masters* me. I rise from my knees, and lean over her.

"Barbara!" I say, in a strangling agony of tears, "you are not *afraid*, are you?"

Afraid! She has all but forgotten our speech—she, who is hovering on the confines of that other world, where our speech is needed not, but she just repeats my word—"*Afraid!*"

Her voice is but a whisper now, but in all her look there is such an utter, tender, joyful disdain, as leaves no room for misgiving.

Nay, friends, our Barbara is not at all afraid. She never was reckoned one of the bravest of us—never—timorous rather! Often we have laughed at her easy fears, we bolder ones. But which of us, I pray you, could go with such valiant cheer to meet the one prime terror of the nations as she is doing?

And it comes to pass that, about the time of the sun-rising, Barbara goes.

"She is gone! God bless her!" Roger says, with low and reverent tenderness, stooping over our dead lily, and, putting his arm round me, tries to lead me away. But I shake him off, and laugh out loud.

"Are you *mad?*" I cry, "she is *not* dead! She is no more dead than *you* are! Only a moment ago, she was speaking to me; Do dead people speak?"

But rave and cry as I may, she *is* dead. In smiling and sweetly speaking, even while yet I said "She is here!" yea, in that very moment she went.

Our Barbara is asleep!—to awake—when? where?—we know not, only we altogether hope, that, when next she opens her blue eyes, it will be in the sunshine of God's august smile—God, through life and in death, *her friend*.

CHAPTER L.

"Then breaking into tears, 'Dear God!' she cried,
'and must we see,
All blissful things depart from us, or e'er we go to
Thee;
We cannot guess Thee in the wood, or hear Thee in
the wind;
Our cedars must fall round us e'er we see the light
behind.
Ay, sooth, we feel too strong in weal to need Thee on
that road;
But, woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth
not on God.'"

I AM twenty years old now, barely twenty; and seventy is the appointed boundary of man's date, often exceeded by ten, by fifteen years. During all these fifty—perhaps sixty—years, I shall have to do without Barbara. I have not yet arrived at the *pain* of this thought: *that* will come, quick enough, I suppose, by-and-by!—it is the *astonishment* of it that is making my mind reel and stagger!

I suppose there are few that have not endured and overlived the frightful *novelty* of this idea.

I am sitting in a stupid silence; my stiff eyes—dry now, but dim and sunk with hours of frantic weeping—fixed on vacancy, while I try to think *exactly* of her face, with a greedy, jealous fear lest, in the long apathy of the endless years ahead of me, one soft line, one lovely line, may become faint and hazy to me.

How often I have sat for hours in the same room with her, without one glance at her! It seems to me, now, *monstrous*, incredible, that I should ever have moved my eyes from her—that I should ever have ceased kissing her, and telling her how altogether beloved she was by me.

If all of us, while we are alive, could stealthily, once a year, and during a moment long enough to exchange but two words with them, behold those loved ones whom we have lost, death would be no more death.

But, O friends, that one moment, for whose sake we could so joyfully live through all the other minutes of the year, to us never comes.

I suppose trouble has made me a little light-headed. I think to-day I am foolisher than usual. Thoughts that would not tease other people, tease me.

If I ever see her again—if God ever give me that great felicity—I do not quite know why He should, but if—if—(ah! what an if it is!)—my mind misgives me—I have my doubts that it will not be *quite* Barbara—not the Barbara that knitted socks for the boys, and taught Tou Tou, and whose slight, fond arms I can—now that I have shut my eyes—so plainly feel thrown round my shoulders, to console me when I have broken into easy tears at some silly tiff with the others. Can even the omnipotent God remember all the unnumbered dead, and restore to them the shape and features that they once wore, and by which they who loved them knew them?

The funeral is over now—over two days ago. She lies in Tempest church-yard, at her own wish. The blinds are drawn up again; the sun looks in; and life goes on as before.

Already there has grown a sacredness about the name of Barbara—the name that used to echo through the house oftener than any other, as one and another called for her. Now, it is less lightly named than the names of us live ones.

I shall always *wince* when I hear it. Thank God! it is not a common name. After a while, I know that she will become a sealed subject, never named; but as yet—while my wound is in its first awful rawness, I must speak of her to some one.

I am talking of her to Roger now; Roger is very good to me—very! I do not seem to care much about him, nor about anybody for the matter of that, but he is very good.

"You liked her," I say, in a perfectly collected, tearless voice, "did not you? You were very kind and forbearing to them all, always—I am very grateful to you for it—but you liked *her* of your own accord—you would have liked her, even if she had not been one of us, would not you?"

I seem greedy to hear that she was dear to everybody.

"I was very fond of her," he answers, in a choked voice.

"And you are *sure* that she is happy now?" say I, with the same keen agony of anxiety with which I have put the question twenty times before—"well off—better than she was here—you do not say so to comfort me, I suppose; you would say it even if I

were talking—not of her—but of some one like her that I did not care about?"

He turns to me, and clasps my dry, hot hands.

"Child!" he says, looking at me with great tears standing in his gray eyes—"I would stake all my hopes of seeing His face myself, that she has gone to God!"

I look at him with a sort of wistful envy. How is it that he and Barbara have attained such a certainty of faith? He can *know* no more than I do. After a pause—.

"I think," say I, "that I should like to go home for a bit, if you do not mind. Everybody was fond of her there. Nobody knew any thing about her, nobody cared for her here."

So I go home. As I turn in at the park-gates, in the gray, wet gloom of the November evening, I think of my first home-coming after my wedding-tour.

Again I see the divine and jocund serenity of the summer evening—the hot, red sunset making all the windows one great flame, and they all, Barbara, Algy, Bobby, Tou Tou, laughing welcome to me from the opened gate. To-night I feel as if they were *all* dead.

I reach the house. I stand in the empty school-room!—I, alone, of all the noisy six. The stains of our cookery still discolor the old carpet; there is still the great ink-splash on the wall, that marks the spot where the little inkstand, aimed by Bobby at my head, and dodged by me, alighted.

How little I thought that those stains and that splash would ever speak to me with voices of such pathos! I have asked to be allowed to sleep in Barbara's and my old room. I am there now. I have thrown myself on Barbara's little white bed, and am clasping her pillow in my empty arms. Then, with blurred sight and swimming eyes, I look round at all our little childish knick-knacks.

There is the white crockery lamb that she gave me the day I was six years old! Poor little trumpery lamb! I snatch it up, and deluge its crinkly back, and its little pink nose, with my scalding tears.

At night I cannot sleep. I have pulled aside the curtains, that through the windows my eyes may see the high stars, beyond which she has gone. Through the pane they make a faint and ghostly glimmer on the empty bed.

I sit up in the dead middle of the night, when the darkness and so-called silence are surging and singing round me, while the whole room feels full of spirit-presences. *I alone!* I am accompanied by a host—a bodiless host.

I stretch out my arms before me, and cry out:

"Barbara! Barbara! If you are here, make some sign! I *command* you, touch me, speak to me! I shall not be afraid!—dead or alive, can I be afraid of *you?*—give me some sign to let me know where you are—whether it is worth while trying to be good to get to you! I *adjure* you, give me some sign!"

The tears are raining down my cheeks, as I eagerly await some answer. Perhaps it will come in the cold, *cold* air, by which some have known of the presence of their dead; but in vain. The darkness and the silence surge round me. Still, still I feel the spirit-presences; but Barbara is dumb.

"You have been away such a short time!" I cry, piteously. "You cannot have gone far! Barbara! Barbara! I *must* get to you! If *I* had died, and *you* had lived, a hundred thousand devils should not have kept me from you. I should have broken through them all and reached you. Ah! cruel Barbara! you do not *want* to come to me!"

I stop, suffocated with tears; and through the pane the high stars still shine, and Barbara is dumb!

CHAPTER LI.

"The last touch of their hands in the morning. I keep
  it by day and by night.
Their last step on the stairs, at the door, still throbs
  through me, if ever so light.
Their last gift which they left to my childhood, far
  off in the long-ago years,
Is now turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through
  the crystals of tears.
'Dig the snow,' she said.
'For my church-yard bed:
'Yet I, as I sleep, shall not fear to freeze,
If one only of these, my beloveds, shall love with
  heart-warm tears,
As I have loved these.'"

It seems to me in these days as if, but for the servants, I were quite alone in the house. Father is ill. We always thought that he never would care about any thing, or any of

us, but we are wrong. Barbara's death has shaken him very much. Mother is with him always, nursing him, and being at his beck and call, and I see nothing of her.

Tou Tou has gone to school, and so it comes to pass that, in the late populous school-room, I sit alone. Where formerly one could hardly make one's voice heard for the merry clamor, there is now no noise, but the faint buzzing of the house-flies on the pane, and now and again, as it grows toward sunset, the loud wintry winds keening and calling.

The Brat indeed runs over for a couple of days, but I am so glad when they are over, and he gone. I used to like the Brat the best of all the boys, and perhaps by-and-by I shall again; but, for the moment, do you know, I almost hate him.

Once or twice I *quite* hate him, when I hear him laughing in his old thorough, light-hearted way—when I hear him jumping upstairs three steps at a time, whistling the same tune he used to whistle before he went.

Poor boy! He would be always sorrowful if he could, and is very much ashamed of himself for not being, but he cannot.

Life is still pleasant to him, though Barbara is dead, and so I unjustly hate him, and am glad when he is gone. Have not I come home because here she was loved, here, at least, through all the village—the village about which she trod like one of God's kind angels—I shall be certain of meeting a keen and assured sympathy in my sorrow?

> ". . . . Where indeed
> The roof so lowly but that beam of heaven
> Dawned some time through the door-way?"

And yet, now that I am here, the village seems much as it was. Still the same groups of fat, frolicking children about the doors; still the same busy women at the wash-tub; about the house still the same coarse laughs.

It would be most unnatural, impossible that it should not be so, and yet I feel angry—sorely angry with them.

One day when this sense of rawness is at its worst and sharpest, I resolve that I will pay a visit to the almshouse. There, at least, I shall find that she is remembered; there, out of mere selfishness, they must grieve for her. When will they, in their unlovely eld, ever find such a friend again?

So I go there. I find the old women, some crooning over the fire, half asleep, some squabbling. I suppose they are glad to see me, though not *so* glad when they discover that I have brought no gift in my hand, for indeed I have forgotten—no quarter-pounds of tea—no little three-cornered parcels of sugar.

They begin to talk about Barbara at once. Among the poor there is never any sacredness about the names of the dead, and though I have hungered for sorrowful talk about her, for assurance that by some one besides myself the awful emptiness of her place is felt, yet I wince and shrink from hearing her lightly named in common speech.

They are sorry about her, certainly—quite sorry—but it is more what they have lost by her, than her that they deplore. And they are more taken up with their own little miserable squabbles—with detracting tales of one another—than with either.

"Eh? she's a bad 'un, she is! I says to her, says I, 'Sally,' says I, 'if you'll give yourself hully and whully to the Lord for one week, I'll give you a *hounce* of baccy,' and she's that wicked, she actilly would not."

Is *this* the sort of thing I have come to hear? I rise up hastily, and take me leave.

As I walk home again through the wintry roads, and my eyes fix themselves with a tired languor on the green ivy-flowers—on the little gray-green linchen-cups on the almshouse-wall, I think, "Does *no one* remember her? Is she already altogether forgotten?"

It is still early in the afternoon when I reach home. The dark is *coming* indeed, for it comes soon nowadays, but it has not yet come.

I go into the garden, and begin to pace up and down the gravel walks, under the naked lime-trees that have forgotten their July perfume, and are tossing their bare, cold arms in the evening wind.

Only *one* of my old playfellows is left me. Jacky still stands on the gravel as if the whole place belonged to him; still stands with his head on one side, roguishly eying the sunset.

Thank Heaven, Jacky is still here, sly and nefarious, as when I bent down to give him my tearful good-by kiss on my wedding-morning. I kneel down, half laughing, half crying, on the damp walk, to stroke his round gray head, and hear his dear cross croak. Whether

he resents the blackness of my appearance as being a mean imitation of his own, I do not know, but he will not come near me; he hops stiffly away, and stands eying me from the grass, with an unworthy affectation of not knowing who I am. I am still wasting useless blandishments on him, when my attention is distracted by the sound of footsteps on the walk.

I look up. Who is this man that is coming, stepping toward me in the gloaming?

I am not long left in doubt. With a slight and sudden emotion of surprised distaste, I see that it is Musgrave. I rise quickly to my feet.

"It is you, is it?" I say, with a cold ungraciousness, for I have not half forgiven him yet—still I bear a grudge against him—still I feel an angry envy that Barbara died with her hand in his.

"Yes, it is I!"

He is dressed in deep mourning. His cheeks are hollow and pale; he looks dejected, and yet fierce. We walk alongside of each other in silence for a few yards.

"Why do not you ask what has brought me here?" he asks suddenly, with a harsh abruptness. "I know that that is what you are thinking of."

"Yes," I reply, gravely, without looking at him, "it is!—what has?"

"I have come to bid you all good-by," he answers, in a low, quick voice, with his eyes bent on the ground; "you know"—raising them, and beginning to laugh hoarsely—"if—if—things had gone right—you would have been my nearest relation by now."

I shudder.

"Yes," say I, "I know."

"I am going away," he goes on, raising his voice to a louder tone of reckless unrest, "*where?*—God knows!—*I* do not, and do not care either!—going away for good!—I am going to let the abbey."

"To *let* it!"

"You are *glad!*" he cries in a tone of passionate and sombre resentment, while his great eyes, lifted, flash a miserable resentment into mine; "I *knew* you would be! I have not given you much pleasure very often, have I?"—(still with that same harsh mirth).—"Well, it is something to have done it *once!*"

I clasp my down-hanging hands loosely together. I lift my eyes to the low, dark sky.

"*Am* I glad?" I say, hazily. "I do not know!—I do not think I am!—I do not think I care one way or another!"

"Nancy!" he says, presently, in a tone no longer of counterfeit mirth, but of deep and serious earnestness, "I do not know why I told you just now that I had come to bid them all good-by—it was not true—you know it was not. What are they to me, or I to them, now? I came—"

"For what did you come, then?" cry I, interrupting him, pantingly, while my eyes, wide and aghast, grow to his face. What is it that he is going to say? He—from whose clasp Barbara's dead hand was freed!

"Do not look at me like that!" he cries, wildly, putting up his hands before his eyes. "It reminds me—great God! it reminds me—"

He breaks off; then goes on a little more calmly:

"You need not be afraid! Brute and blackguard as I am, I am not quite brute and blackguard enough for *that!*—that would be past *even* me! I have come to ask you once again to forgive me for that—that old offense" (with a shamed, red flush on the pallor of his cheeks); I asked you once before, you may remember, and you answered"—(recalling my words with a resentful accuracy)—"that you '*would not, and, by God's help, you never would!*'"

"Did I?" say I, with that same hazy feeling. Those old emotions seem grown so distant and dim. "I dare say!—I did not recollect!"

"And so I have come to ask you once again," he goes on, with a heavy emphasis—"it will do me no great harm if you say 'No' again!—it will do me small good if you say 'Yes.' And yet, before I go away *forever*—yes"—(with a bitter smile)—"cheer up!—*forever!*—I must have one more try!"

I am silent.

"You may as well forgive me!" he says, taking my cold and passive hand, and speaking with an intense, though composed mournfulness. "After all, I have not done you much harm, have I?—that is no credit to me, I know. I would have done, if I could, but I could not! You may as well forgive me, may not you? God forgives!—at least"—(with a sigh of heavy and apathetic despair)—"so

they say!—would *you* be less clement than He?"

I am looking back at him, with a quiet fixedness. I no longer feel the slightest embarrassment in his presence; it no longer disquiets me, that he should hold my hand.

"Yes," say I, speaking slowly, and still with my sunk and tear-dimmed eyes calmly resting on the dull despair of his, "yes—if you wish—it is all so long ago—and *she* liked you! —yes!—I forgive you!"

CHAPTER LII.

"Love is enough."

And so, as the days go by, the short and silent days, it comes to pass that a sort of peace falls upon my soul; born of a slow yet deep assurance, that with Barbara it is well.

One can do with probabilities in prosperity, when to most of us careless ones it seems no great matter whether there be a God or no. When all the world's wheels seem to run smoothly, as if of themselves, and one can speculate with a confused curiosity as to the nature of the great far cause that moves them; but in grief—in the destitute bareness, the famished hunger of soul, when "one is not," how one craves for *certainties?* How one yearns for the solid heaven of one's childhood; the harping angels, the never-failing flowers; the pearl gates and jeweled walls of God's great shining town!

They may be gone; I know not, but at least *one* certainty remains—guaranteed to us by no outside voice, but by the low, yet plain tones, that each may listen to in his own heart. That, with him who is pure, and just, and meek, who hates a lie worse than the sharpness of death, and loves others dearer than himself, it shall be well.

Do you ask, where? or when? or how? We cannot say. We know not; only we know that it shall be well.

Never, never shall I reach Barbara's clear child-faith; Barbara, to whom God was as real and certain as I; never shall I attain to the steady confidence of Roger. I can but grope dimly with outstretched hands; sometimes in the outer blackness of a moonless, starless night; sometimes, with strained eyes catching a glimpse of a glimmer in the east. I can but *feel* after God, as a plant in a dark place feels after the light.

And so the days go by, and as they do, as the first smart of my despair softens itself into a slow and reverent acquiescence in the Maker's will, my thoughts stray carefully and heedfully back over my past life: they overleap the gulf of Barbara's death and linger long and wonderingly among the previous months.

With a dazed astonishment I recall that even then I looked upon myself as one most unprosperous, most sorrowful-hearted.

What in Heaven's name ailed me? What did I lack? My jealousy of Roger, such a living, stinging, biting thing *then;* how dead it is now!

Barbara always said I was wrong; always!

As his eyes, in the patient mournfulness of their reproachful appeal, answer again in memory the shrewish violence of my accusation on the night of the ball—the last embers of my jealousy die. He does not love me as he did; of that I am still persuaded. There is now, perhaps, there always will be, a film, a shade between us.

By my peevish tears, by my mean and sidelong reproaches, by my sulky looks, I have necessarily diminished, if not quite squandered the stock of hearty, wholesome, honest love that on that April day he so diffidently laid at my feet. I have already marred and blighted a year and three-quarters of his life. I recollect how much older than me he is, how much time I have already wasted; a pang of remorse, sharp as my knife, runs through my heart; a great and mighty yearning to go back to him at once, to begin over again *at once, this very minute*, to begin over again—overflows and floods my whole being. Late in the day as it is—doubly unseemly and ungracious as the confession will seem now—I will tell him of that lie with which I first sullied the cleanness of our union. With my face hidden on his broad breast, so that I may not see his eyes, I will tell him—yes, I will tell him. "I will arise, and go to him, and say, 'I have sinned against Heaven and before thee.'"

So I go. I am nearing Tempest: as I reach the church-yard gate, I stop the carriage, and get out

Barbara was always the one that, after any absence from home, I used first to run in search of. I will go and seek her now.

It is drawing toward dusk as I pass, in my long black gown, up the church-path, between the still and low-lying dead, to the quiet spot where, with the tree-boughs waving over her, with the ivy hanging the loose luxuriance of its garlands on the church-yard wall above her head, our Barbara is taking her rest.

As I near the grave, I see that I am not its only visitor. Some one, a man, is already there, leaning pensively on the railings that surround it, with his eyes fixed on the dark and winterly earth, and on the newly-planted, flagging flowers. It is Roger. As he hears my approaching steps, the swish of my draperies, he turns; and, by the serene and lifted gravity of his eyes, I see that he has been away in heaven with Barbara. He does not speak as I come near; only he opens his arms joyfully, and yet little diffidently, too, and I fly to them.

"Roger!" I cry, passionately, with a greedy yearning for human love here—at this very spot, where so much of the love of my life lies in death's austere silence at my feet—"love me a little—*ever so little!* I know I am not very lovable, but you once liked me, did not you?—not nearly so much as I thought, I know, but still *a little!*"

"*A little!*"

"I am going to begin all over again!" I go on, eagerly, speaking very quickly, with my arms clasped about his neck, "quite all over again; indeed I am! I shall be so different that you will not know me for the same person, and if—if—" (beginning to falter and stumble)—"if you still go on liking *her* best, and thinking her prettier and pleasanter to talk to—well, you cannot help it, it will not be your fault—and I—I—will try not to mind!"

He has taken my hands from about his neck, and is holding them warmly, steadfastly clasped in his own.

"Child! child!" he cries, "shall I *never* undeceive you? are you still harping on that old, worn-out string?"

"*Is* it worn out?" I ask, anxiously, staring up with my wet eyes through the deep twilight into his. "Yes, yes!" (going on quickly and impulsively), "if you say so, I will believe it—without another word I will believe it, but—" (with a sudden fall from my high tone, and lapse into curiosity)—"you know you must have liked her a good deal once—you know you were engaged to her."

"*Engaged to her?*"

"Well, *were not* you?"

"I never was engaged to any one in my life," he answers, with solemn asseveration; "odd as it may seem, I never in my life had asked any woman to marry me until I asked you. I had known Zéphine from a child; her father was the best and kindest friend ever any man had. When he was dying, he was uneasy in his mind about her, as she was not left well off, and I promised to do what I could for her—one does not lightly break such a promise, does one? I was fond of her—I would do her any good turn I could, for old sake's sake, but *marry* her—be *engaged* to her!—"

He pauses expressively.

"Thank God! thank God!" cry I, sobbing hysterically: "it has all come right, then—Roger!—Roger!"—(burying my tear-stained face in his breast)—"I will tell you *now*—perhaps I shall never feel so brave again!—do not look at me—let me hide my face; I want to get it over in a hurry! Do you remember—" (sinking my voice to an indistinct and struggling whisper)—"that night that you asked me about—about *Brindley Wood?*"

"Yes, I remember."

Already, his tone has changed. His arms seem to be slackening their close hold of me.

"Do not loose me!" cry I, passionately; "hold me tight, or I can *never* tell you—how could you expect me? Well, that night—you know as well as I do—I *lied*."

"You *did?*"

How hard and quick he is breathing! I am glad I cannot see his face.

"I *was* there! I *did* cry! she *did* see me—"

I stop abruptly, choked by tears, by shame, by apprehension.

"Go on!" (spoken with panting shortness).

"He met me there!" I say, tremulously. "I do not know whether he did it on purpose or not, and said dreadful things! must I

tell you them?" (shuddering)—"pah! it makes me sick—he said" (speaking with a reluctant hurry)—"that he loved me, and that I loved him, and that I *hated* you, and it took me so by surprise—it was all so horrible, and so different from what I had planned, that I cried—of course I ought not, but I did—I *roared!*"

There does not seem to me any thing ludicrous in this mode of expression, neither, apparently, does there to him.

"Well?"

"I do not think that there is any thing more!" say I, slowly and timidly raising my eyes, to judge of the effect of my confession, "only that I was so *deadly, deadly* ashamed; I thought it was such a shameful thing to happen to any one that I made up my mind I would never tell anybody, and I did not."

"And is that *all?*" he cries, with an intense and breathless anxiety in eyes and voice, "are you sure that that is *all?*"

"All!" repeat I, opening my eyes very wide in astonishment; "do not you think it is *enough?*"

"Are you sure?" he cries, taking my face in his hands, and narrowly, searchingly regarding it—"child! child!—to-day let us have nothing—*nothing* but truth—are you sure that you did not a little regret that it must be so—that you did not feel it a little hard to be forever tied to my gray hairs—my eight-and-forty years?"

"Hush!" cry I, snatching away my hands, and putting them over my ears. "I will not listen to you!—what do I care for your forty-eight years?—if you were a hundred—two hundred—what is it to me?—what do I care—I love you! I love you! I love you—O my darling, how stupid you have been not to see it all along!"

And so it comes to pass that by Barbara's grave we kiss again with tears. And now we are happy—stilly, inly happy, though I, perhaps, am never quite so boisterously gay as before the grave yawned for my Barbara; and we walk along hand-in-hand down the slopes and up the hills of life, with our eyes fixed, as far as the weakness of our human sight will let us, on the one dread, yet good God, whom through the veil of his great deeds we dimly discern. Only I wish that Roger were not nine-and-twenty years older than I!

THE END.

VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

A Novel.

By MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF "OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," "THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY," &c.

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VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG THE HILLS.

I WOULD rather not state exactly whether it lies in the North of England, or the South, or the East, or the West, for some old inhabitant may swoop down upon me with proof of the fogginess of my memory, or the inaccuracy of my local geography. But I do assert that Highshire is one of England's most beautiful counties, and that it owes its beauty chiefly to the glorious hills that guard, and almost encircle, the small county town of Churchill. Hill beyond hill, hill behind hill, they stretch for twenty miles. The highest of the group—throughout the district called, *par excellence*, The Mountain—rises seventeen hundred feet above the level of the sea. Yet its ascent is easy now, as a carriage-drive has been constructed round it, railed to insure the safety of the many horses which are brought here through the summer months. The summit of the mountain is a vast table-land, and its sides are rich in furze and heath and bracken; but it is hardly so favorite a resting-place for the picnic parties which flock here from spring to autumn, as is the beautiful ravine which separates the mountain from the opposite hills.

At the head of this ravine, a restless stream falls over the rocks, and forms a cascade of considerable height; then, following its irregular course, it dances on, from right to left, and left to right, through the soft green turf, while countless small streams from the hills opposite rush, with a laughing music, down to join it, swelling it at last to an imposing rivulet before it darts from the turf under the low stone bridge below the valley gate. For the low sweep of level turf, lying between the mountain and the chain of smaller hills, is wide enough here (where it meets the road) to be termed a valley, though but a narrow and a rugged ravine where the hills close above it near the water-fall. Behind and beyond the fall, as the ravine grows wilder and more rugged, and the hills tower higher still on either side, the scene is wild and desolate, the isolation complete, and the way dangerous. The sides of the hills are so broken into deep, narrow passes with precipitous sides, and the rocks rise, now so sharp and pointed, now so treacherous in their smooth, sheer descent, that what wonder is it that in Churchill records there are names of those who have been lost among these hills?

A little above the fall, and in a hollow which the foot-path does not reach, though it is gradual and verdant, lies a silent mountain tarn, a still lake, which has an unspeakable gloom about it, beyond that gloom which seems to belong to all water lying in the shadow of the hills. No one who stands a moment upon its brink, wondering at its stillness, but is glad to leave it, and pass down into the valley, where the sunshine falls so widely and so warmly. . . .

But we can leave the valley now. We pass through the gate, beside which stands a picturesque little cottage, where tea is provided for picnic parties, and stabling for the horses, which are seldom taken beyond here, and find ourselves out in the turnpike-road. On our right, bordering the valley, lies the steep, well-ordered garden of the rectory; and from its sloping drive, or from the door of the handsome modern house, our eyes can take in a wide stretch of the valley below. Behind, the carriage-drive round the mountain skirts the farm-yard of the rectory; for the Reverend Henry Jorden is no mean farmer, and his comely wife does not fancy the produce of any dairy but her own.

A quarter of a mile more of wide, white road we traverse, and then we come upon the old gray church, standing high and grave among the mountain shadows, looking always down upon the one steep street which forms the little town of Churchill. Midway down this long street stands the old-fashioned pump, with its three lamps above; and opposite this, a narrow side-street ends abruptly in the railway-station. We pass the sleepy shops and quaint old houses of the main thoroughfare, and reach the more pretentious dwellings in the suburbs, dwellings over whose gray stone walls the holly bulges with a look of comfortable abundance, hiding the "genteel villa" from the vulgar gaze. Then again, we find ourselves in the hedge-bound road, which winds on before us to Bleaborough, the county town of Highshire; and behind us, through Churchill, on, and on, and on, to London.

Two miles, uninterrupted by any dwelling we need mention, then upon our right rises the high gray wall which bounds the park of High Athelston, broken presently by the bronze gates and ivy-covered lodges. Two lamps hang high above the gates, and between them stands a great stone shield, bearing the arms of the Athelstons—a leopard couchant. A grand old mellow house is High Athelston, standing among the rich and heavy trees, as it has stood for centuries. From the wide gates a stately avenue leads to the pillared entrance. Passing this without entering, we descend one of the flights of steps which lead from terrace to terrace on the western side of the house, and turn aside into a by-path across the park; thread our way through a sombre shrubbery, where thick, dark arches of yew and holly make twilight of the sunniest summer noon; and

reach a narrow green door in the north wall of the park. Passing through this, saluted noisily from the rookery in the high old limes above us, we find ourselves in Nether Lane, a narrow road bordered by two rows of low elms, which in summer-time throw heavy bars of shade across the sunlit way. Midway between this door and Churchill—for the lane merges into the high-road on the outskirts of the town—stand the only two cottages which the lane contains. They are built under one roof, and lie back in a vegetable-garden, divided into two by a narrow paling. The sheltering trees do not extend beyond the cottages; the lane is open then, and when we reach the end we stand once more in the suburbs of Churchill.

But we have now a journey to make beyond the town in the opposite direction; so again we pass the picturesque old lamp half-way up the hilly street; linger a moment looking into the peaceful church-yard; then walk on along the highway, which the Churchill people designate "the London road," while on the other side of the town it is known only as "the Bleaborough road."

And now, after only a few minutes' walk, we reach The Anchorage, the pleasant sunny little estate of Colonel Alick Stuart, who brought his young wife here four years ago, but is a widower now, and has his sister and her little boy staying with him.

On still further from the town, back among the woods and close down beside the lazy river, lies the old manor-house of Hawkedale, which has been in the possession of the Castillains for almost as long a time as the Athelstons have held sway at High Athelston; and which is possessed now by the first Castillain who, for two hundred years, has had no son to succeed him; a matter of rejoicing among those who believe in the old proverb, "Like father, like son." A handsome old manor is Hawkedale, but both without and within are evidences unmistakable of the grinding nature of its old master, whose mania for saving is as inexplicable as it is pitiful.

Heaven only knew—as his younger daughter used to say—for what or whom he had been saving through all his three-score years and ten, and would save still for three-score years and ten more, if the pleasure could be extended for him through that length of time. No; Heaven only knew!

"We have nothing here as they have at High Athelston or at The Anchorage," would sometimes be the thought of Marjorie Castillain, as she tried with her own hands to cut the shrubs, or get her flowers to bloom in the old conservatories, which were not even weather-proof. "At High Athelston they have every thing to make the place magnificent; luxuries and games and enticements everywhere; great stone figures on the terraces, and splendid foreign trees and shrubs; and servants to keep the place beautiful from end to end. And at The Anchorage they have—oh! such rare, sweet flowers, and such a wonderful atmosphere of peace and ease and rest! while we—well, we have our grim old trees, at any rate," the girl would add, with laughing philosophy, "and our river; and these two things have a beauty of their own which the famous family miserliness can not extinguish."

And now we have ended our walk round Churchill.

One high lamp flickers feebly upon the platform of the Churchill station, and one burns a little more steadily in the booking-office. The down express has just gone on its way, after having deposited one passenger, and two boxes which the porter is carrying. The station-master, holding in leash two handsome greyhounds, which have the couchant leopard embroidered on their coats, stops and speaks respectfully to the solitary passenger upon the platform.

"We've a fire in the office, miss. If you'll stay there, I'll see that all is right about your luggage."

There are moments when a kind word will summon tears which coldness can not bring, and for Lina Chester this was one. She felt them starting painfully to her eyes as she answered that she had hoped a cab would be here to take her to High Athelston.

"Not yet, miss," the station-master said, smiling to hear her use a word almost unknown in Churchill; "there is no fly here to-night. But Sir Neil Athelston will be sending soon for these greyhounds of his, which came by your train."

"Thank you," said the girl, entering the office with a slow and spiritless step; "then I will wait."

As she sat beside the fire, a gentleman came into the room, and began to compare his watch with the clock that hung there.

"I was afraid I should miss the up-train," he remarked, pleasantly, to the station-master; "but I see it is not due yet. I am a little fast."

Though Colonel Stuart stood, to all appearance, intent upon altering his watch, he was still keenly aware of the presence of the lonely girl who sat waiting so quietly in the dingy room. He noticed—for he could not help noticing it—the delicate beauty of her face, the rare unusual beauty of a face with no color on the creamy white cheeks, no brilliance in the dark-gray eyes, no smile upon the small curved lips; but he noticed, most of all, the indescribable, almost indefinable sense of utter, quiet loneliness that seemed to surround her.

"There is generally a fly sent to meet this train," he said to her, in a kindly, pleasant voice; "but it is not here to-night, of course, because it is wanted. I shall be calling at the Leopard on my way back. May I send one round for you then?"

Lina—because he spoke so gently and so warmly to her—half turned away her face, for fear of those tears that were so near her eyes to-night, and so saw nothing of the grave and pitiful gaze he bent upon her.

"I am come to meet my sister and my little nephew," he went on. "If you are going in our direction—"

"I am going to High Athelston," replied Lina, glancing up at last.

"Oh!" said Colonel Stuart; and she detected an accent almost of pity in his gentle, genial tones. "Lady Athelston is an invalid, and rather forgetful; so you will, I'm sure, excuse her not having sent the carriage. She will be mortified when she recollects."

Lina smiled, knowing the words were intended to cheer her; and just at that moment a carriage was heard rolling up to the station-gate. A quick, authoritative voice called the station-master by name, then whistled a summons which the greyhounds were quick to answer.

Lina's breath came a little quicker. Was some one come now to take her to her new, strange home? She heard the station-master whispering when he led the dogs out, and she guessed that he was telling their master how she was waiting there to be conveyed to High Athelston. Her cheeks burned hotly when she caught the impatient answer.

"Best thing she can do, too. Send for a fly from the Leopard. What is the use of detaining me? My horses can not stand here all night. Now, Ridley, look sharp after Coquette; she is at her old tricks. Ah! Stuart, you here?"

Then the loud tones ceased, and Lina Chester knew that the gentleman who had for ten minutes been her companion was conferring with Sir Neil Athelston in a semi-whisper, as the station-master had done, and on the same subject. The answer was less impatient now, but more careless.

"Not very likely, Stuart. It's not in my line; nor can I spare Ridley to go round by the Leopard. Send a fellow from here. I'm too infernally tired to drive myself."

The sad, girlish face beside the smoldering fire grew whiter and whiter, while Colonel Stuart pleaded again. Then the answer was a little quieter, though even more selfish.

"Very well. Here, Ridley, go round to the Leopard for a cab, and make haste, man. I can not wait, so you may drive home on it. I wish to Heaven, Stuart, that the old lady would remember to give her own orders. I hope this girl has a memory long enough to serve for both."

Without a word of reply, Colonel Stuart reentered the office, and spoke quietly to Lina.

"Sir Neil Athelston's servant is gone to hasten the fly. It is too cold for you to drive three miles in a dog-cart, as Sir Neil himself is doing, with his dogs."

Lina had understood it all too well for any smile to visit her eyes or lips in answer to his, and she was glad when another train dashed into the station, and Colonel Stuart went out to meet it.

It was while she sat once more waiting alone, that the same imperative voice called to the station-master, while from a door in the booking-office—opposite that which led to the platform—a gentleman advanced and impatiently looked round him in the dimness. A tall gentleman, Lina saw he was, as he came on into the light—tall and broad-shouldered, with a Saxon face, handsome, though indolent and sensual; a thick, fair mustache; strong, blue eyes; and short, curling, light hair.

"Where the deuce *is* that fellow?" Sir Neil Athelston gave a start—a real start, though it was imperceptible to Lina—then came on easily, and stood beside the fire opposite her. A certain superficial, scornful expression, which was habitual to him, gave place to a deep intentness as he looked into the girl's face, so purely and delicately beautiful, and he raised his hat with a slow, satisfied smile.

"A dismal waiting-room," he said, and his tone, though condescending, was a little eager too.

No answer. This was Sir Neil Athelston, and Lina remembered how he had spoken of her on the platform both to the station-master and to Colonel Stuart.

"If I understand aright, I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Chester. If so, may I drive her to High Athelston?"

"No, thank you," answered Lina, feeling her loneliness most keenly at that moment. "You said that to wait for the cab was the best thing I could do."

Sir Neil laughed, but spoke still more eagerly, with his eyes fixed upon the young, white face. "You had better come, Miss Chester; do let me drive you. I did not intend you to wait in this hole."

"You are too tired to drive even yourself," Lina said, raising her eyes fully to his for the first time. "Besides, it is not in your line, you said."

"Pray pardon those stupid words of mine," said Neil Athelston, flushing hotly, and feeling awkward as he never remembered having done before; actually forgetting for that moment that he was at present the idol of many a London drawing-room, and withal the handsomest young baronet in half a dozen counties. "It is unkind of you to recall those absurd speeches of mine," he added, feeling terribly anxious now to win another glance from the beautiful, sad eyes. "I did not think that you would hear. I did not—you know I had not seen you, and so you ought not to reproach me."

"I did not reproach you," said Lina, tiredly; "but I would rather wait here until your servant comes with the cab."

By this time the train had left the station, and the passengers whom it had deposited followed Colonel Stuart into the office. These were his sister and her son, with the boy's tutor, an aristocratic, foreign-looking man of three-and-thirty, just three years younger than the bearded English soldier whose hair was thin upon his temples, and whose eyes were so deeply and gravely thoughtful.

Sir Neil Athelston turned and greeted Mrs. Esdaile; and she, glancing kindly at Lina, and evidently understanding who she was, asked him to introduce her. "As we are to be neighbors," she added, in a voice as pleasant as her brother's.

Neil went through the ceremony, his voice lazy and rather haughty, but the color mounting slowly into his face. "Mr. Jelfrey, Miss Chester," he ended, as the tutor bowed low before Lina.

Then Neil Athelston's eyes filled with a great surprise, for he had never before introduced two people who received his introduction as did these two. And yet he could not have told how this was, if he had tried. A something quite indefinable there was in the gaze of each. Was it fear, or was it only astonishment?

"Mr. Jelfrey, Miss Chester."

The words were scarcely uttered, when Lina shivered with an uncontrollable suddenness. Mr. Jelfrey had left the door open, and the chill night wind crept in. Quietly he moved from Sir Neil's side, and shut the door; then, returning, looked full into Lina's small, white face, as if questioning her in an eager, unintelligible silence.

"Miss Chester feels the place chilly," he said; and Lina slid her traveling-cloak over her hands, which were clasped rigidly together.

"I am waiting for you, Miss Chester," pleaded Sir Neil, trying to hide the real anxiety with which he spoke.

"I am waiting for the fly," she answered, calmly ignoring his words.

"And we must go too, Alick," said Mrs. Esdaile to her brother. "Are you ready?"

"Quite ready," rejoined Colonel Stuart, who for the last minute had been curiously watching Jelfrey's face. "Come, Jack, jump up to your seat."

Just as the carriage from The Anchorage left the station-yard, the hotel fly drove up, and Lina took her place. The men were putting her boxes on the roof, when Sir Neil, who had stood at the door ever since he had assisted her in, spoke suddenly to his groom.

"I say, Ridley, drive on with the greyhounds; they want looking after, and they make the dog-cart deucedly uncomfortable. I'll come on after you. Make haste."

And the next moment, easily and patronizingly, he had taken his place beside Lina.

On every subject that occurred to him he talked, through that drive in the closed fly, which, in itself, was a sore penance to him. Perhaps he wished only to amuse her, and shorten the distance for her; perhaps—and this was likely to be far nearer the truth—only to amuse himself, if he could, by drawing some few words from her quiet, beautiful lips, or making her eyes turn to his, as they had turned only once.

But all his efforts were in vain. Except cool monosyllables, or an occasional indifferent remark, Lina did not speak at all; and never once did she turn her eyes upon him from the moment the fly left the station till it stopped before the portico at High Athelston. The footmen, standing at the open door, with the rich light from the hall falling upon their powdered heads, saw, with intense and speechless astonishment, that it was their master who issued from this thoroughly-to-be-despised vehicle, and turned and offered his hand to a lady; saw, even with greater astonishment, that she passed it by without noticing it.

"Of course, the poor thing—only a companion, you know—was too confused to know what to do. She actually walked up the steps, leaving him to follow. He might well look angry and disgusted. What a little upstart she was!—pretty, though—very pretty! only wanting in color."

Thus the twin Mercuries; while Sir Neil Athelston, following the slight, quiet figure into the brilliant hall, was puzzled in his thoughts as he had not been puzzled before.

What was there about this girl which made him feel so unusually strange? Why was she not awkward and shy in this first introduction to his magnificent home? Why, she entered it with just such a quiet grace as he could fancy its young mistress—what a ridiculous thought!

"Where's my lady, Martin?" he asked, as the butler came toward them, looking quite as much a gentleman as Sir Neil himself, thought Lina, in her ignorance and bitterness.

"My lady has gone to her room, I believe, Sir Neil. She bid me tell Miss Chester that tea is served for her in the blue morning-room."

"Will you not dine, Miss Chester?" interrupted Sir Neil, eagerly.

"I would rather not," said Lina, shrinking hastily from the idea of dining with him. "I would rather not."

"She never attempts even any excuse for her avoidance of me," thought Neil, and his lips tightened rather cruelly under the handsome light mustache.

Drawing off his coat leisurely, he watched her pass on up the broad, lighted staircase, and he thought that, though so thoroughly at her ease, there was a certain shrinking in her eyes and steps, as if she avoided even *seeing* the handsome place further than she need—a certain nameless shrinking, quite apart from any shyness.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NIGHT AT HIGH ATHELSTON.

The blue morning-room, in which Miss Chester's tea was laid, was a small luxurious apartment, rarely used by Sir Neil, but a favorite one with his mother, who preferred it, and her own boudoir and dressing-room, to the more grand and spacious rooms below. A bright fire burned in the grate, for the air of the spring night was chill; and Lina sat down before it, her heart literally crowded with sad and busy thoughts. Unutterably lonely she felt; yet there was something beyond the loneliness which was even harder to bear.

"A something which I dare not think about to-night!" she cried to herself, pushing the dark hair from her temples, and looking eagerly round the room, as if seeking some thought that should chase this one away.

"Bright, pleasant things all round me," she whispered, in a voice that strove to be glad and brave. "I will always try to think only of the bright and pleasant things that are around me."

Just as she thought that thought, there entered the cheerful-looking young maid-servant who had volunteered to assist her when she changed her traveling-dress.

"My lady will be glad to see you in her dressing-room, Miss Chester, if you'll please to come. My lady's very deaf, 'em," the girl added, evidently for the sake of hovering curiously about Lina, yet speaking with thorough respect, and no air of gossiping, "and she likes persons to speak up like when they're talking to her. Fletcher, her own maid, has a curious voice that never wants raising; it goes sharp in like without my lady's trumpet; and she hears Sir Neil nearly always, though he doesn't talk to her very much; but she's bad with strangers. If you're not very tired after your journey, 'em, it would be best just to speak up, as your voice is very—at least, it's been very quiet to me. Shall I come to your room to-night, 'em, to see if I can help you? I'll always be glad to help you, Miss Chester, though I'm only under Fletcher. Margaret my name is, so you'll always know who to send for when you want help—won't you?"

Lina thanked the girl pleasantly, even gratefully, then followed her along a wide, arched corridor, and into Lady Athelston's dressing-room.

As the maid closed the door slowly upon Lina, a lady, who sat in a lounging-chair at the fire, turned round to scrutinize her. At a glance Lina could have told that this was Sir Neil's mother; and at a glance she saw that the face which met hers was weak and uncertain, a little querulous, and a little cruel. But the helpless look which generally accompanies deafness, the mute, unconscious appeal of the attitude, won Lina's gentle sympathy in that first moment, and she advanced gratefully to take the outstretched hand,

never giving one glance to where Sir Neil, in his faultless evening dress, leaned against the low chimney-piece opposite his mother.

"Take this chair, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, pointing to one which had been placed beside her own. "Leave it where it is," she added, her eyes keenly fixed upon the girl; "leave it there. I want you to sit where I can see you."

And Neil, from his position opposite, seemed to think it was just as necessary that he, too, should be able to see her.

Still and quiet, Lina sat under the gaze of both mother and son; still and quiet, yet with that nameless shrinking from them of which Sir Neil was all the time half conscious, as he watched her with a steadfast intentness which made her lips shake, but brought no crimson to the delicate white skin.

"You have had a cold journey, I fear, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, with sleepy gentleness. "From where have you traveled today?"

"Only from London," answered Lina, speaking through the trumpet which Lady Athelston held to her ear.

"From the house where you have been living as governess?—from the lady in Berkeley Square to whom I wrote about you?"

"Yes," said Lina, but in such a strange low voice of pain, almost of fear, that Sir Neil decided promptly in his own mind that her experience of governess life had been far from rose-colored.

"Dreary life, Miss Chester, eh?" he remarked. "Wouldn't you rather teach an intelligent dog to stand on his head than a child to work a sum?"

"I never tried the 'intelligent dog,'" answered Lina, with quiet carelessness.

"I think you told me you had no home," put in Lady Athelston, unconscious this time of her son's speech.

"No; no home," the girl answered, simply.

"And no relations?"

"No, Lady Athelston."

"Fortunate child!" put in Sir Neil.

As Lina spoke, her face had flushed slowly and duskily for the first time, and not a shade of this was lost upon him.

"Then, where do you live when you have no engagement?" persisted the lady.

"I never had but one situation," said Lina, coldly, "and I left that only when I came here."

"Now, mother," put in Neil, "we are getting tired."

"You have a pretty name, Miss Chester," said Lady Athelston, readily understanding her son—as she could when he chose that she should—and taking his hint, as she always did. "Is it an abbreviation of Helena?"

"No, my lady," answered the girl, her lips stiff and proud.

"Lina Chester, eh? Was your father any relation to the celebrated barrister?"

"I believe not."

And then Neil saw that the small lips blanched suddenly, and he told himself that there was a secret held there, which it would not take him long to find out.

"You read aloud well, I understand from the answer I received to my letter to Mrs. M'Mullen, in Berkeley Square," resumed Lady Athelston, "and it will be one of your chief duties here. Others will be— Neil," she broke off, as if suddenly aware of the needlessness of her son's presence at this interview, "are you not going to have a cigar?"

"Presently, mother. A polite method of turning me out, Miss Chester; but it is a hint which I am far too obtuse to see. I never was educated to take hints. Go on with the list of duties, please," he added in a louder key; "go on, mother; I'm necessary for the supply of marginal notes." And so saying, Sir Neil seated himself coolly.

But when Lady Athelston had enumerated various requirements in a slow, tedious fashion, and he had failed to attract Lina's attention by his asides, he interrupted, laughing,

"Don't you think those are about enough for one dose? How do you like the prospect, Miss Chester? They are duties, you know, and England expects you to do them all! We can not even promise to make them pleasant to you either," he added, lazily, as he leaned forward on his low seat. "My mother and I are not pleasant people to live with. She is a little too selfish, and a great deal too much under the influence of any mischief-maker who chooses to influence her, and I am always out."

"Then you can hardly be unpleasant to live with," said Lina, coldly smiling.

"Yes, my son is generally away," said Lady Athelston, having caught something of his last remark; but, of course, Miss Chester, your duties are quite independent of him; and you will, I hope, always pursue them conscientiously."

"Quite independent of him; yes, my lady," she answered; and Neil Athelston wondered whether the quiet tone was really sarcastic or only indifferent.

Then Miss Chester rose to go, with a sudden though gentle independence, which astonished him and brought a laugh to his eyes, as he hastened to open the door for her, and held his hand to her as she passed—held it almost pleadingly.

But, without raising her own, Lina bowed, and walked slowly on to her own chamber. There for a long hour she sat quite still, with her head buried in her hands, asking her own heart many a painful and anxious question. Had it been wise to come here? Had it been even right to make her home under this roof, though only temporarily?

"The temptation was too strong," she moaned to herself; "and I did it for the best—but, oh! I despise him! I despise him; and I know I shall grow to do so more and more. I might have known it. I might have known how fiercely I should hate any one of his name. But—but I did it for the best."

And then, in the silence and solitude of this lonely midnight, the girl's overtasked strength gave way, and passionate, vehement sobs shook the slight, delicate form.

All this while Sir Neil Athelston, idly smoking, wondered why this girl should haunt him so unaccountably, and repicture herself forever in the curling, fragrant wreaths of smoke.

There was the small, rounded form; the motionless white hands; and, above all, the beautiful face, with its delicate features and pure, white skin. Nothing would chase these away—though he was very doubtful whether he wished them

chased away—and he dawdled to his room at midnight, still following one thought.

"I must play a double game, I suppose," so this one thought ran. "I hope both parts will be equally pleasant, as both parts will be equally easy."

And with a smile upon his handsome, sensual face, he passed the closed door behind which Lina knelt alone, battling with a great, unwhispered pain.

CHAPTER III.

SOWING THE BITTER SEED.

"Why, Neil, this is a new thing. I can not remember the day when you have breakfasted with me, when we have been alone. Certainly Miss Chester and I have finished, but still it is wonderful. What has brought the change?"

"There's no act of parliament to prevent a man's changing his mind," was Neil Athelston's careless answer, as he sauntered up to the breakfast-table, giving his mother a light touch on the shoulder as his morning greeting, and offering his hand to Lina with a smile.

"You said it disagreed with you to come down before the day was thoroughly aired," resumed Lady Athelston, motioning him to the chair beside her.

"My mother just as often fancies she hears what is *not* spoken, as misses hearing what is," he explained, in a cool aside to Lina; but a slow, dusky flush rose in his face as he took his cup from her hand, loitering unnecessarily over the slight act.

"It requires a more vivid imagination than I possess to picture that," she answered, lightly.

"Is your imagination not very vivid, then?" he asked, quietly drawing his chair nearer to where she sat presiding at the head of the table. "I should have fancied it was. But, as my mother continually tells me, I am no decipherer of character. Fact is, I never have troubled myself about it. A plain face can have no charm for me, however much character it may possess; and a beautiful one needs no character beyond its beauty—to me it could possess none."

"Neil," interrupted his mother, unconscious of this speech, "do you dine at Hawkedale to-day?"

"I suppose so," he answered, coldly. Then he went on addressing gay commonplaces to Lina, his tone full of animation. But, when he saw with what utter indifference she received these speeches, he turned almost angrily away.

"Are you going to drive to-day, mother?"

"Yes. I have promised Louisa Castillain to drive to Hawkedale."

"Is Miss Chester going with you?"

"No, not this time," replied Lady Athelston, who did not like the point-blank question. "I shall leave her at liberty to examine the grounds and gardens. I dare say she will be glad of the change, after being indoors with me all the morning."

A gleam of gentle kindness, rare and very beautifying, crossed Lady Athelston's face as she spoke; and Lina smiled in gentle recognition of it.

"When shall you go?" inquired Neil, as he helped himself to a cutlet, apparently with his whole heart in the act.

"After luncheon. Now, Miss Chester, will you go and cut the flowers for my rooms? I shall like you, as a rule, to do that always before breakfast. I do not like being late in the mornings."

"Never mind with what invalidish sleepiness and idleness you spend the day afterward, if you are but early in the mornings," laughed Neil, rising to open the door for Lina. "My late breakfasts have for years been looked upon by my mother as the ruin of this house; but my hopes rise gradually, as the years go by, and the house does not fall about us in ashes."

"Neil," began his mother, as the door closed upon Lina, "I am sorry I engaged her. I think—I fear it will not be a good thing; she is too pretty."

"Too pretty!" laughed Neil, repeating the words as if he liked them. "Too pretty!—for you or for me?"

"Too pretty for her position; you know what I mean," replied Lady Athelston, in the querulous tone she always unconsciously adopted with her son, when she wished her words to be heeded. "And too delicate—too pretty for her position. Don't you see what I mean?"

"An impossibility so long as her position is here," replied Neil, with nonchalance. "Who is she, mother?" he added, abruptly, as he went on with his breakfast. "I never thought of asking the question until I saw her; now I want it answered."

"I know nothing of her save what I told you before she came," returned Lady Athelston, pettishly; "and you took no heed, and no interest, and never attempted to help me."

"Who sent her here?"

"No one. She answered my advertisement in the *Times*."

"Who gave her a character, or certificate, or passport, or whatever 'companions' call it?"

"She sent me the address of a Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square, to whom I wrote about her. I told you all this at the time, Neil, you know," complained his mother.

"And what did she—this Irish Londoner—condescend to say of Miss Chester?" inquired Neil, sipping his cocoa.

"She said a hundred things, always speaking in the highest terms of the girl. And so I engaged her, as I told you I should, because how could I tell she was so—so pretty?" stammered Lady Athelston, almost ashamed of giving utterance to her reason.

"Impossible till you saw her," laughed Neil, "unless Mrs. Mac had told you Miss Chester was so very pretty that she had felt compelled to dismiss her. Mother," he added, stooping lower to her ear, "has she ever lived in this neighborhood before?"

"Never, that I am aware of," was the answer; "indeed, I know that she has not, because she told me, half an hour ago, that she knew nothing of Highshire."

"And yet—and yet I could have sworn that she and Jelfrey recognized each other last night, and that one or two things which I told her about ourselves were familiar to her—only a fancy, I suppose."

"What, Neil? You always aggravate me so

when you do not speak out," put in his mother, fretfully.

"I was saying, if you would just take trouble to listen," rejoined Sir Neil, with careless composure, "that Jelfrey looked as if he had seen Miss Chester before, when he was introduced last night, and that I hope you will not talk to *him* about her."

"You are always making insinuations against your mother, Neil," fretted Lady Athelston.

"I only insinuated that your nature was charmingly flexible and communicative," Sir Neil answered, with a smile that was half a sneer, as he strolled away to the conservatories to watch Lina at her task. And as he watched her, there grew once more that unusual gravity in his eyes.

"You will not want me to-day, I suppose, my lady?" asked Fletcher, with the vicious sniff which she indulged in as a vent for her ill-temper, and which would have lost her her place long ago if she had not had both a deaf mistress and a sufficient modicum of tact to choose her opportunities of indulging in the luxury of this mark of disapprobation.

"Not constantly to-day," answered her mistress, almost deprecatingly. "Miss Chester will be with me."

"I've seen her this morning," said the maid, in just that penetrating voice which her subordinate had tried to describe to Lina the night before; "I did not see her yesterday."

"Miss Chester is very pretty, isn't she, Fletcher?" inquired Lady Athelston, mildly.

"Pretty!" ejaculated the woman, with a toss of her head; "I do not know what you call pretty, then, my lady. Why, her complexion's just dough, and nothing more or less; and she's nothing but an atomy."

Whether Fletcher meant an atom or an anatomy will ever remain a mystery, since Lady Athelston did not think it worth while to inquire.

"I don't like 'companions,' sniffed Fletcher, with vicious emphasis. "There's always mischief made between mistress and maid when there's a companion in the way."

"You should not anticipate such things," said Lady Athelston, almost startled at the idea. "No mischief can be made for you by Miss Chester."

"It is very kind of you to say it, my lady," replied Fletcher, resignedly; "but she can not help it. Companions always must make things uncomfortable in a house, and it is always best to be prepared. Don't let it take you unawares, my lady," she added, with deep cunning; "don't you be tempted into trusting a stranger instead of those that have served you and honored you for years and years."

They were only a few insignificant words, spitefully uttered; but such foul seeds take root sometimes, and bear rank weeds, the growth of which may overmaster us, as they fling their poisonous tendrils round our lives.

As soon as luncheon was over that day, Lady Athelston gave Lina her liberty, and recommended her to take a long exploring walk in the park and gardens.

"We dine alone at seven," she added, "as Sir Neil will be at Hawkedale; and you are free to enjoy yourself until then."

The prospect of the walk was delightful to the girl, who craved for solitude with an intense and almost bitter craving, and she started at once. From the arched door-way on the western side of the house, she came out upon one wide graveled terrace bordered by low, massive stone walls, along which, at intervals, stood the old and beautifully cut stone figures which were among the sights of High Athelston, and between these were urns and vases, filled with flowers and rare trailing plants.

Down the broad white steps went Lina, to the second terrace, where fanciful seats were placed in the shade of the fragrant shrubs upon the slope, and from which she looked down to where, beyond the third terrace, stretched the velvet sweep of turf where archery, lawn-billiards, cricket, tennis, croquet, and every imaginable game, were established. As she reached the bottom of the third flight of steps, Lina came upon Sir Neil Athelston leaning against the figure of Ajax, which stood huge and high upon the balustrade above the lowest step. Her bright anticipation of enjoyment vanished in an instant when he turned, rapidly and eagerly, at the sound of her step, and made it evident that he had been waiting and listening for it.

"Which way are you going, Miss Chester? Along the terrace to the gardens, or on here into the park? We have grottoes, and caverns, and fountains, and all kinds of things to show you, if you are interested in them."

"I am not going any farther than this," said Lina, so simply and naturally that he began to wonder in himself whether the girl had any deficiency of common sense.

"Not going any farther!" he echoed. "Why, you have the whole of the afternoon at your disposal. The old lady is safe until dinner-time. She will not on any consideration forego her afternoon tea and gossip with Miss Castillain—a rare plant, Louisa Castillain; a bitter herb which would have rejoiced the heart of any witch a hundred years ago. So—so come, Miss Chester," he added, in his tone of lazy patronage, "I have a hundred things I should like to show you."

"What is that tower on the rising ground?" asked Lina.

Not choosing to walk on, but too proud to make any resistance, she waited a minute, speaking in an easy tone, as she leaned against the statue of Ulysses which stood opposite to that of Ajax, guarding the lowest step of the lowest terrace.

"Merely a summer-house, which one of my idle forefathers built to smoke in," Neil answered, looking across at her without attempting to follow the direction of her glance. "There is what you girls call a nice view from there. Come and see."

"And that path through the shrubbery, and among the trees, and past the wooden bridge—to what does that lead?" continued Lina, not in the slightest moved by his words.

"That leads merely out of the park by one of the back entrances. You see that line of firs and limes, where the rooks are holding a parliament now, and discussing woman's suffrage? Well, there is a door among those trees which leads from the park into Nether Lane, and this path leads to it. Would you like to come and see?—though it is by no means the prettiest way."

"It is a very beautiful park," said Lina, cool-

ly; "but the hills above the firs there are more beautiful."

"Now, Miss Chester," laughed Sir Neil, "that is said in pure perverseness. This park—though I say it that should not—possesses every thing that can make a park beautiful. Own that you spoke in pure perverseness."

"The hills are very beautiful," said Lina, nervously; "but when I spoke I was thinking of something else."

"Not of the park's possessor, I fear?" asked Neil, with laughing arrogance.

"Not of the park's present possessor," replied Lina, in a rapid tone, and with an unnatural brightness and restlessness in her eyes.

"The park's old possessors," rejoined Sir Neil, evidently only desiring to keep her there, "are not worth thinking about. The Athelstons have been a race of handsome scoundrels ever since they have been a race at all. Do not go in—please do not go in, Miss Chester. I was bored to death until you came out; and it has been so pleasant since."

But Lina went on up the steps, only answering his words by a light and careless smile.

"Come to the grotto, Miss Chester," he continued, eagerly, as he turned and walked beside her. "Come to the conservatories—anywhere; or let us play croquet."

But, even in all his eagerness, Sir Neil could not help a laugh after he had proposed this.

"That temptation had something ludicrous in the sound of it," he said; "yet I have seen two people play croquet often, with all their hearts and souls. Why should the proposal concerning you and me have tickled me so irresistibly?"

"The idea *was* ludicrous," she answered, simply.

"Please do not be so scornful. I can play," he said, the laugh still in his eyes, as he sought one in hers. "I do not like the game generally, and I hate it at times; but I can hit a ball when I wish. Will you try me?"

"I have never played croquet in my life."

"Have you not? Then you will let me teach you?" entreated Neil, quite serious again. "I shall be so happy; and you must understand it, because we Highshire folks are strong in croquet. We think existence incomplete without our croquet-club, which is bound to give a handsome wedding present to any couple who owe their marriage to it. Queer, isn't it? But it makes the affair a little less diluted. It is such a grand idea for a lady to have to spend her pocket-money in buying a wedding present for her rival, as well as having had to witness the match made up. I hate croquet as an institution; but as a medium for all kinds of flirtations, spite, and jealousy, I think it is the finest invention of the age. Don't you?"

"I have not yet seen the playing of the Highshire Club," returned Lina, in a quiet tone which made Neil laugh heartily.

"Archery is another notable diversion among us," he said; "and our prominent feature is the ease and complacency with which we shoot wide of the mark. You do not shoot, of course?"

"No," answered Lina, as they slowly reached the top of the last flight of wide, low steps.

"I thought not. Leave stronger hands than yours to pull the bow-string."

And as Sir Neil spoke, he put out his right hand, and with a sudden gesture—rapid, though very gentle—touched the slight white fingers which held her dress.

A vivid tide of crimson darted across the girl's pale face, fading as instantly as it spread; then, with twitching lips and a passionate brilliance in her eyes, she passed him with fleet steps and entered the house.

"It is not natural," muttered Neil, angrily, "and I do not understand it. If I were some kind of old philosopher, I should say I had offended her in another world. It just seems as if she had some mad reason for her incomprehensible behavior. That is impossible, of course; but perhaps I had better not have gone quite so far just yet."

As Sir Neil Athelston sauntered round the terrace, feeling unusually ill at ease, Mr. Jelfrey came up the avenue and joined him. He made no direct remark upon the defeat which he read in the young baronet's face—Eustace Jelfrey's tact was too keen for that—but, by slow degrees, and skillfully disguised questioning, he drew from him at last a confession of his admiration for Lina Chester.

"She *is* very pretty," ruminated the tutor, as if the idea had just struck him.

"She is far more than that," interrupted Sir Neil, hotly; "she is very beautiful. I should have thought you would have been as much entranced as I was last night."

"My dear Sir Neil," answered Jelfrey, airily, "such luxuries as are within your reach are totally impossible to me. You may talk of, and encourage, your admiration for the beautiful; I must curb and conquer mine."

"Poor Jelfrey!" laughed Sir Neil, though the blood coursed a little quicker in his veins; "yet I am almost tempted to believe you, for you did not exhibit one sign of admiration when you were introduced to Miss Chester last night."

"Because a face strikes you as irresistible, Sir Neil, must it necessarily strike every one else so?"

"Yes—such a face as that. It is one whose beauty is unquestionable; about which there can be no shade of doubt; not like some, of which you may hear a hundred different opinions."

"As Miss Castillain's, for instance," put in Mr. Jelfrey, smiling.

"Miss Castillain's!" sneered Sir Neil. "I thought every one agreed in calling *her* handsome. Why, man, every feature she possesses is as clearly cut as if she had been the prize model among statues of prigs."

"I hardly know how they would be cut under the circumstances," replied Jelfrey, with a slow, sinister smile; "but, when I spoke, I referred to Miss Marjorie Castillain."

"Oh!" rejoined the baronet, carelessly.

An odd look passed over the tutor's face, half triumphant, half scornful.

"Who would imagine, Sir Neil," he said, "that you appreciate your unrivaled advantages? Who would believe that you felt yourself engaged to the richest girl in the county—at least, the one who will be the richest—and living under the same roof with the most beautiful; and—luckiest of all—that you knew you had power to charm both?"

"I do *not* know it," returned Neil, moodily.

"I do," put in Jelfrey, while he keenly watch-

ed his companion's face; "one part is undoubtedly done already; the other nearly so, I presume."

And then Sir Neil, taken unawares, and led on by Jelfrey's quiet interest and attention, was won to tell him how openly Lina avoided him.

"Shy," decided Jelfrey, promptly. "I saw it in her face last night. But *that* will surely not discourage you, Sir Neil? Why, such a girl as that is just the one to like you all the better for a dauntless persistency. She will hardly notice it herself, but, unconsciously, your courtesy will grow pleasant to her, then necessary."

"I do not fancy it," Neil answered, thoughtfully. "I never saw a girl who could be so entirely and quietly independent, yet be so small and gentle and lovable. By-the-way, Jelfrey," he added, suddenly turning to look into his companion's face, "did you ever see Miss Chester before last night?"

"I!—I see her before? Never!" exclaimed Eustace, uttering the glib lie very hurriedly.

"I beg your pardon, then. It was a stupid suspicion of mine."

"And can you really be discouraged, Sir Neil," asked the tutor, as if glad to leave that subject, "and let the shy diffidence of a girl—childish, misdirected pride perhaps, or, more likely still, a disguise for other feelings—chill you in trying to amuse yourself in her society until you go back to town? From what you have told me of Miss Chester, I take her to be just one to be readily moved by constant attention from such as you; and if she is not, I think I can help you."

"How?" questioned Sir Neil, quickly.

"I can do it," Jelfrey answered, slowly, "but I will not interfere unless you require my help; and you need not require it unless you choose. I am an older man than yourself, Sir Neil, by half a score of years at least, and after a large experience—which I have gained by knocking about the world as few men have done—I give you one piece of advice for winning this girl's admiration; persist steadily in showing your admiration for *her*. Now I must go. I was anxious to see Lady Athelston, but, as she is out, I will not stay. Perhaps I may meet her."

Eustace Jelfrey walked back down the avenue, and Neil sauntered round the house, until he was fain to give up the hope of Lina's coming out again; then he ordered his horse and cantered out into the road, his thoughts retaking their old self-complacency, and shaping themselves almost as they had done the night before.

"Yes, mine will decidedly be a double game. Odd that the resistance seems, after all, as if it were going to make the one part only all the more attractive, and that, where there is most to win, the part should be so easy. Well, my experience in women is pretty wide, and I generally find their smiles ready enough."

CHAPTER IV.

MARJORIE.

"For me, Martin? Was the card sent to me?"

The corpulent, middle-aged butler at High Athelston, who had made an unusual exertion for Lina, told her that Miss Castillain's card had been especially sent to Miss Chester; and then, hoping she fully appreciated the compliment he had paid her by bringing it himself, backed slowly from Lady Athelston's boudoir, where the girl sat arranging countless and many-colored diamonds of satin for the cushions which Lady Athelston delighted to make.

"*Marjorie Castillain.*"

Lina read the words on the card as she rose. "Some message for Lady Athelston, I suppose, which she will not trust to a servant. But I wonder she even knew my name."

And as Lina said it, walking slowly down the wide stairs, a flush spread over the delicate face to which the pallor was so much more natural than the bloom.

As she entered the first drawing-room, a lady came forward from one of the windows, with her hand outstretched. There was something in the first meeting of these two girls which made them feel that it was not quite an ordinary meeting, though neither understood what this something was. Each was anxious to read the nature of the other, yet there was no curiosity, no inquisitiveness. On the one side there was frankness, yet no patronage; on the other, a shrinking silence that was not timidity; on the one, a gay lightness, yet no flippancy; on the other, an earnestness that was almost sad. As for the faces, and what was written there, they were read at once.

Miss Castillain's great eyes took in Lina's nature at a glance; and Lina knew in after-years that her first impression of Marjorie Castillain had been true and exact. The two, without being widely different, were an artistic contrast to each other. Marjorie Castillain was not a beautiful girl, yet there was a wonderful grace in her tall and lissom figure; a power almost beyond beauty in her bright, restless face; a power quite beyond beauty in her character, contradictory as it was; fearless though gentle, thoughtful yet gay, earnest and sincere, beyond all words, where she once set her heart to love or to aid; humble and grateful for any love or care that might be given her; yet rebellious and defiant enough at times to try all love to the uttermost. This was Marjorie, with all her contradictions; disclosing in her face, as she stood there in the April sunshine which brightened the long luxurious room, a specimen of girl-nature such as one rarely meets—not on account of the rarity of any one of its qualities, but on account of the rarity of finding them together.

"When a strange family settles in this neighborhood, Miss Chester, all the surrounding families make a point of calling," she began, with characteristic frankness; "so when a strange lady comes, I feel it to be the duty of other ladies to do the same. And here I am—such an old friend of Lady Athelston's and Sir Neil's that you must let me be your friend too."

"You are very good," began Lina, feeling the tears starting, more at the bright, gentle kindness of Miss Castillain's eyes than at her friendly words.

"Good!" she echoed, laughing. "Do not say that until you know me."

"I will say it again, then," answered Lina, gently.

"Never. Nobody ever says it who knows me.

I do not say I am not good—I have a private opinion of my own that I am so, only not appreciated. My own sister, for instance, whenever there is any thing to say against me, she does say it with such a relish. But you will soon find that out when you know her. Her name is Louisa—an ugly name, isn't it?"

"I do not like it very much," modified Lina, as an answer was expected.

"No, of course not. Still it has the advantage of being a name you occasionally hear; while mine—ugh! Marjorie! Don't you picture an old nurse in a mob-cap? What an insult it was to my future prospects when, in my incapacity, they gave me the name of an old dame Castillain who lived two hundred years ago. It would not have mattered if they could have given me her beauty too; but to give me the name without it! Cruel, wasn't it, Miss Chester?"

"I think it depends on what she was like," smiled Lina.

"I did always long for beauty," replied Marjorie, her eyes very bright and earnest as she looked into her companion's lovely face; "but I am outgrowing those envious fancies now. I ought to, ought I not, as I approach the awful shadow that hovers about the age of one-score and ten, much more terrible to a woman than the three-score and ten."

"I shall be thirty in three years," said Lina, simply.

"*Shall* you!" echoed Marjorie, her eyes full of astonishment as they rested upon the small, girlish figure. "But you should not put it so; you should say you are 'more than twenty.' Every age is beautiful for a beautiful woman."

"Still, it is very near thirty," smiled Lina, wondering at the earnestness in Miss Castillain's voice.

"I am as near your age as possible, Miss Chester," she said, forbearing to tell her age—which was three years younger—as many girls would have done if they had been three years older; "and I do not think it so awful now as I did before I came. There, I said 'awful' again, didn't I? I have got into a way of using slang words, which makes papa get furious—but, then, it does not take very much to make him furious with me—and Louisa suffers terrible mental spasms. Have you heard about my father, Miss Chester?"

"No," answered Lina, a little surprised.

"Haven't you? Well, you soon will. He's odder than you can imagine, unless you are extraordinarily gifted in the imagination line. He is a caution!—oh! Miss Chester, I really did not mean to say it; it pops out in spite of me. At first I used to say these words just to provoke the old folks at home—that means my father and Louisa—but, somehow, now they seem to have got the mastery over me, and crop up continually. But now I want to tell you as much as I can of Churchill lore while I am here. You have passed through the prim, old-fashioned town. You might be inclined to think it insignificant after London, but you would be woefully mistaken, I can assure you. It has legends which rival those of Winchester and Canterbury; and it is historical, too. Why, years and years ago, the queen came here as Princess Victoria. And not only that, but when the mayor had read an address from her loyal subjects, etc., and she congratulated him and them on their picturesque town, saying, 'Yours is a very old town, Mr. Mayor,' the mayor (mayors are obliged to be self-possessed in the presence of royalty, and well-informed as the mouth-piece of the people) answered, quite readily, 'Yes, *ma'am*, it has *ever been* considered so.' Why laugh, Miss Chester, at what I think a solemn retrospect? Could you believe that my father heard it, and knew Mr. Mayor, and lived? But my father would live through any thing, I do believe. He is an extraordinary and unusual man, you see, and I am naturally proud of him. It is not every girl, is it, Miss Chester," Marjorie asked, in her fresh, young, happy voice, "whose father is an inveterate, mean, successful miser?"

"I hope not."

"You hope not? That must be because you know so little of the subject. Just think what a splendid thing it is to die worth twice as much as you were worth when you came of age! Think what a radiance the circumstance casts around a dying bed! You have heard of the man who 'lived a poor man lest a poor he died?' Well, my father is just such a lunatic. Pleasant and unselfish, isn't it, when he lives with others, and must die alone?"

"But if he saves for others?" questioned Lina.

"Whoever he saves it for, it is a selfish and narrow idea," replied Marjorie, resolutely; "but though I tell him so, he never improves under my teaching. Now, what do you think happened, even within my memory? He was coming home up the park one day, in just the miserly, shabby clothes he wears about his place, when he met an old beggar-man coming down from the house. This beggar, of course, thought he recognized a fellow-creature in similarly extreme penury, and advised him, with a knowing wink—that is another word I ought not to use—to make haste up, because a young lady was about who had given him sixpence, and that, if the old governor had been there, he would have had him turned off the grounds. My honored parent saw the mistake, and encouraged it. 'Are you sure you did get a sixpence?' he said. 'Show it up.' The man exhibited it in his dirty palm, and the squire—his great-great-grandfather once sold all his plate and jewels, and laid a purse of forty thousand pounds in the lap of his hunted and impoverished queen!—took the coin out of the dirty hand, pocketed it coolly, and went chuckling up to the house, telling the man that the old governor *would* have him turned off the grounds. Then he came straight in and scolded me for an honr. Oh, I felt so benevolent after that! I could not tell you what good deeds I was perpetually performing while the influence was upon me. Do you feel as if you knew a little of my respected parent's peculiarities now, Miss Chester? If you happen to come up to the manor some day, and see an old man felling trees, you may be pretty sure that that is the squire. I have known people accost him at his work, and ask if Mr. Castillain were up at the house. He saves a man's wages by this, you know, and that is a consideration. By these and other means he has succeeded in amassing an immense fortune for each of his daughters. I shall have a little more than Louisa, because my godfather left me two or three thousand pounds last year; but that seems to make very little difference when we each inherit

about seven thousand a year. So we can not be jealous of each other, can we? Oh no, we never are. When I hear Louisa's beauty praised, I only sigh, and say I wish it were more than skin-deep; and when she hears me rebuked, she only sighs too, and says, 'Poor Marjorie! it is a pity she can not be like other young ladies.' I hope you have not an elder sister, Miss Chester; and I not only hope it for your sake, but for hers too," added Marjorie, with a comic seriousness, as she gazed at the lovely face opposite her.

"No, I have no sister; but I have always thought it a misfortune instead of a matter of congratulation."

"Well, let me advise you from henceforth to rejoice about it," returned Marjorie, concisely, "for I have had wide experience, and I say that elder sisters are a mistake of nature. Oh, I shall be awfully glad when Louisa marries! Why are you smiling? I said 'awfully,' did I? What a bore! I meant exceedingly glad. I suppose —of course" (Miss Castillain faltered a little, but not nervously, for her eyes were full of fun), "Lady Athelston has told you that I am engaged to Sir Neil, has she?"

The question was asked so debonnairly that—being what it was—it took Lina by surprise, and she could not help showing this. Marjorie laughed merrily.

"Didn't she? I wonder at that, because she generally takes the very earliest opportunity of telling the little fact to every one whom it doesn't in the least concern, just as if she were preparing a mass of witnesses for a possible breach-of-promise case. Yes, I have been engaged to Sir Neil for — how long?—three years at least; and I don't know *why*, any more to-day than I did on the day he proposed to me. Very handsome he looked, I remember, and very chilly it was in the autumn woods. But we did promise to love each other, and that sort of thing. I think we considered it rather a jolly arrangement—I beg your pardon, I mean rather an amicable sort of arrangement. As we had so long been badgered into it—I mean teased into it—I suppose we thought it best to get it done, and so we did it. Still, there was romance in the matter, too. I don't know whether there wasn't more romance than there is in the generality of cases; indeed, I am inclined to feel sure there was. Neil was so very nice, and looked so — so like a baronet with a rent-roll of ten thousand a year, and the lion of the last season; and I was so very much obliged to him, because I wasn't the belle of any season, and never shall inherit in my own right a magnificent place like High Athelston. I was mildly pleased and grateful; and so you have no idea what a satisfactory and romantic matter it was altogether, and how the nation rejoiced over it — I mean the county. Can you fancy it? The mothers of the penniless daughters, who had been absurd enough to fancy that Sir Neil Athelston had enough without my paltry seven thousand a year, and the penniless bachelors who had fancied that that paltry seven thousand might help them to bear the expense of matrimony! Can you fancy it?"

"Not at all," said Lina, merrily.

"Some day," continued Marjorie, "I really must show you the spot where 'the low-breathed vow was uttered.' I forgot whether it was low-breathed, but, at any rate, it was a vow, and I suppose we are bound to keep it 'till death us do part:' I didn't mean to say that; I hate using those words too familiarly. That was three years ago. Neil must have been quite young—what age?"

"I could calculate better if I knew what age he is now," said Lina.

"He is twenty-five this summer."

"Two years younger than myself," put in Lina, almost unconsciously.

"Yes, he was born with the June roses—I like to express myself poetically whenever an opportunity occurs. Then he must have been twenty-two when he did it. How young to plight his troth for good and all! How young to have discovered the advantages of marrying one of Squire Castillain's daughters! But, after all," continued Marjorie, with comic gravity, "my greatest surprise is how he could have had, at that age, sufficient discernment to choose me, and steer clear of the acid mixture with which a marriage with my esteemed sister would have filled his cup of happiness! Let me see, did I like or dislike him most on that romantic day I am telling you of?"

"Oh, Miss Castillain!" cried Lina, really shocked.

"I forget," decided Marjorie, evidently intensely amused by Lina's surprise. "I can only remember thinking how well he walked over the ugly dead leaves, and that walking beside him there was rather a pleasant sensation — only cold."

"But now?"

"Oh, now—whatever it may have been then —I dislike him a good deal."

"Oh, Miss Castillain—and engaged to him!"

"And engaged to him—yes, Miss Chester," she answered. "Were you going to observe that such engagements are desecrations of our most beautiful law? I know it, and am sure it ought to be written in our prayer-books — in larger letters than that 'a man may not marry his grandmother'—that 'a man may not marry the woman he does not love.' Don't you think so?"

"I hope there are few such engagements, Miss Castillain," said Lina, seriously.

"Do you?" inquired Marjorie, with a curious questioning in her eyes. "And I know there are many — more, at any rate, than you and I can dream of in our philosophy. There is something very amusing about every thing connected with our approaching marriage," she continued, laughing. "It is one of the few things from which I can glean a joke or two in spite of papa and Louisa. It is fun to know that it is so widely published that I can never have the opportunity of refusing any other suitor; and it is fun to know that Lady Athelston is in a mildly chronic state of dread lest it should not come off! Poor, dear old lady! I wish I thought it would make her less deaf for her son to have a wife he can not manage, or that it would shed roses under her lazy feet! Poor old lady! I can not help saying it, though I do really like her very well, and am sorry for her too—just as I should be sorry to see a substantial branch of ivy, with years and years of life in it, obstinately determined to cling to a hop-pole."

"Does that represent Sir Neil?" asked Lina, smiling.

"No; the hop-pole has a wider significance. Lady Athelston *must* cling to some one; so, though her son will not act the oak which is needed, she still clings to him, varying the performance by attaching herself to that Gorgon of a maid of hers, or to Louisa, who is sufficiently gifted to pour a constant stream of scandal into that blessed trumpet—I mean, that trumpet—and most especially of all to Mr. Jelfrey, from The Anchorage, who is more gifted still, in a hundred ways. He is a clever fellow, though, really, and wants—wants one of Mr. Castillain's daughters for his wife."

"Which one?" asked Lina, laughing at Marjorie's method of putting the case.

"Well, it does not, perhaps, signify *much*, because their wealth is so nearly equal. He would like, at any rate, to have the two strings ready drawn on his bow, so that when one snaps, there is the other all ready. Don't you admire his infinite tact?"

"If it is tact," said Lina, quietly.

"Such tact I consider sufficient to place him on the highest pinnacle of greatness in these days. But I can never give you half an idea how exquisitely clever Mr. Jelfrey is. I can only hope the knowledge will gradually dawn upon you. It would take years to gauge the depth and the height and the width of his intellect. He is certainly only a tutor, but—joking aside—he is wonderfully more than that too; and then he is undeniably handsome; and it is not always that one can meet a very handsome and very gentlemanly and very clever man, eh?"

"But you dislike him?" inquired Lina, gazing eagerly, almost entreatingly, into Marjorie's face.

"No," Marjorie answered, readily, "I do not; I hate him. I have often said I hate Neil too; but I am not sure about that, though they are friends. 'Show me a man's friends'—do you remember?—'and I will tell you what the man himself is.' There is something, though, in Neil's nature which makes me think that he might be better; just the same thing, however, *may* prove that he might be worse. I have never yet seen any better part dominant, and I have often seen the worse; so I am only getting deeper and deeper into the Slough of Dislike. How do *you* like him?"

The question was asked so suddenly that Lina's answer sounded chill and deliberate after it.

"Do not ask me, please. Sir Neil Athelston and I are such utter strangers."

"You will not be utter strangers for long, Miss Chester," Marjorie said, wondering a little at the proudness of the reply. "It does not take long to sound the depths of such a nature as Sir Neil Athelston's, *I* think; at any rate, as far as I have been able yet to judge."

"I should fancy you could judge best of all, Miss Castillain."

"I do not know; I am not sure, but I fancy *you* may know him before I do."

She spoke quite gravely, though the speech meant nothing but a random surmise. But so unnaturally pained and proud Lina's face grew at the few words, that Miss Castillain bitterly regretted them.

"We talk of our wedding sometimes," resumed Marjorie, in her own light tones again, "and we try to be so anxious over it, and fail so beautifully. I choose Africa for our wedding tour, because other married couples don't go there, and because Neil likes to do what the Grundies do. I rarely begin the subject, though. Do you know why?"

"I can guess," smiled Lina.

"Can you? That's right; because I am not going to tell you—till I have told Neil himself. Oh, if my father thought there was any hitch—I hope that is not slang—in our prospects, he would lock me up for a year at least; and Louisa would tell the world in a bewailing tone, and be supremely happy. Miss Chester, haven't I cause to love, honor, etc., my father, who never utters a loving word to me from morning to night, and only remembers my existence just as an agent in this marriage; while he knows the Athelstons are a selfish, dissipated, unprincipled race? I do not think there ever will be a good and upright master here until the old name dies out; and there does not seem much prospect of that, does there, when you look at the stalwart figure of the present baronet?"

"There may be an Athelston, even yet, who will redeem all," said Lina Chester, with a grave, inexplicable sadness.

"There may; but it does not seem very likely, now that they have borne the same reputation for centuries. Neil knows it; indeed, he rather boasts of it, and says they have gradually got worse up to the present representative. Oh, I doubly hate him when he says such things! The last baronet but one was awfully wild—I mean was very wild. He married a beauty, the heiress of a cotton prince. You can see still that Lady Athelston has been a beauty. He died only a few weeks after his marriage, of typhus fever, on his wedding-tour. Can't you fancy what an incapable nurse his wife was? Serve him right! In a year's time the next baronet (that one's cousin) married her. He was a reckless, dissipated fellow, and, they say, hastened his own death; but he lived until his only son (Neil) came of age, and he educated him on his own model."

"Was the last baronet—I mean the last but one—at all like the present one in appearance?" asked Lina, rather earnestly.

"Like Neil? Oh dear, no; quite a contrast in appearance, as you may see by the portraits of him here; there are plenty of them, aren't there? He was handsome enough, high-bred, and distinguished-looking in the extreme; but he was, for all that, no credit to any family. He stood out as unprincipled, even among the unprincipled Athelstons. He was just one of those cool, persuasive men, in whose power it lies to work more than the average share of wrong, and to be unsuspected of it."

"I thought so," answered Lina, unconsciously.

"Yes, I dare say you have heard of him. Neil's father was a random, hare-brained, selfish fellow, bent on his own aims and pleasures—just as Sir Gerard was—but openly and avowedly so, like Neil; and the wrong he did, every body knew he did. Do you understand this difference?"

"Thoroughly."

"And now I have told you enough of them, haven't I? Let us dismiss them with your hope that there may some day be a worthy Athelston of High Athelston. Unlikely as it seems, we may as well indulge ourselves in the notion of

the possibility. Whom else shall I tell you of? Mr. Jorden, the rector, with his large head, and his large heart, and his large wife, and his small daughter? And I say no wonder his head is large, when it is crammed with all the confessions of his flock; and no wonder his heart is large, when it holds comfort for every body; and no wonder his wife is large, when she does nothing all day; and no wonder his daughter is small, when she has been brought up as a tiny precious pearl of inestimable value, which, if lost sight of by the parents, would be immediately swallowed up by the great gaping dragon of a world that lies beyond Churchill. She is not a bad little creature, only you will know of what sort, when I tell you she writes little three-cornered notes about nothing, and signs them always 'Emmie J.' If I could just live to see one of her letters uncrossed, and signed 'E. Jorden,' I should have some hope of her. Another thing is, that she thinks all women are made to be smiled at and petted, like kittens, and that all men delight in doing the smiling and petting part. I often wonder whether her notions, or mine, are nearer the truth."

"Hers may be true as regards some women and some men," laughed Lina.

"Yes, I suppose so; and I hope mine are true as regards other women and other men. Miss Jorden is the type of the weak-minded girls of Highshire, as my sister Louisa is the type of the strong-minded. Ugh! no wonder men are to be found who think scorn of either extreme. But, *àpropos* of Miss Jorden, she is setting her cap now—with all its bows flying—at Mr. Jelfrey. It used to be at Sir Neil, but she got tired. Not that I blame her for setting her cap at any one," broke off Marjorie, flushing a little in her laughter, "we all do it, of course. It is an exclusive woman's right."

"Do you, Miss Castillain?" inquired Lina, gently laughing.

"I? Indeed I do. My cap is almost worn out now from its frequent setting; and you should see Louisa's!"

"But you have not told me yet about Colonel Stuart and The Anchorage," put in Lina, when she was grave again.

"Oh, I can not tell you about him because—because I never know how to describe him. He is—bald."

"*Very* little," said Lina, wondering at the new, restless earnestness she detected in her visitor's tone. "I have seen him."

"Have you? Do you like his face?"

"Very much."

"You could hardly help it, could you? But," added Marjorie, with a sudden, careless merriment, "he *is* bald, you see; or, as little Jack Esdaile said, when he came from abroad, and saw his uncle, 'He has another forehead on the top of his head.'"

"I do not think I noticed it," said Lina, laughing.

"Didn't you? Why, one part of his head shines just like a mirror; and the other day when I saw a speck settled there in bold relief, I had to go away, for fear of being too strongly tempted to dust the glistening surface for him."

"Oh, hush!" cried Lina.

"It is odd that so many men grow bald quite young, isn't it?" resumed Marjorie, demurely. "Do women grow bald too, and hide it with caps and chignons? or haven't they enough brain to work its way through? Well, it is a happy thing for me that Neil Athelston is not at all likely to lose any of his hair till he is about ninety. Colonel Stuart's story is rather a romance, Miss Chester. Shall I tell it you? His sister married the only son of a man supposed to be the richest merchant in London, but who died insolvent. And because, before this, Colonel Stuart had heard—or found out, or guessed, or something—that Captain Esdaile's only sister, a delicate, gentle girl of seventeen, was—was—what shall I say? —fond of him—loved him (not as Miss Jorden loves Eustace Jelfrey, but as Viola loved the Duke of Illyria), he came forward (now that her father was dead and her brother going back to Australia, and she penniless), and married her, and brought her here, to be as happy as the day was long at The Anchorage. Poor little thing! In the midst of all her happiness, she died before they had been married quite a year. Are you tired, Miss Chester!—you look so very white."

"Only as I always do," answered Lina, simply; but she drew her hand across her forehead, with a kind of weary bewilderment.

"Soon after that," went on Marjorie, "Mrs. Esdaile and her little boy came to England, and they have lived with Colonel Stuart ever since. Captain Esdaile is working in the diamond fields now, but I hope he will be able to come back soon. They say he has always been a stern, hard man; but I call him just and upright. I believe he was terribly hard on some man who forged his father's name when they were rich; still I do not judge by that, because sin deserves its punishment. But all this only tires you; and you look as if you had grown terribly tired of me during the last few minutes. So those are all at The Anchorage, except the tutor with whom Miss Jorden is smitten; that isn't slang, and I don't feel compunction at telling her secret. When she herself doesn't keep it, what respect can I have for it?"

"Then Colonel Stuart was a widower within a year of his marriage-day?" asked Lina.

"Yes. Wouldn't it be awful to marry a widower? One would always be mentally compared, disadvantageously, with the first wife; because of course all the bad qualities of a wife are forgotten after she is dead. I wouldn't be any child's step-mother, or any man's step-wife."

"Colonel Stuart has no child, has he?" asked Lina, laughing.

"No," returned Marjorie, the reply rather hurried. "But I did not say I was thinking then of Colonel Stuart. It is a terrible fact to think how safely he has cast anchor as an old bachelor-widower. I was merely rehearsing my determination never to be any one's second love."

"Girls often make those determinations, and act exactly in opposition," remarked Lina.

"Not girls like me. Now, I will tell you Colonel Stuart's latest freak. He has brought an artist—not at all a first (but rather a fifth) rate artist—down here to take some sketches for illustrating a book Colonel Stuart's father wrote about Highshire. He found him out by buying a sketch that was for sale; for no one told of, or recommended, him. This artist has one of the cottages in Nether Lane, and he lives there in such a queer huggery-muggery way (I hope that's a real word).

The oddest thing is that, though of course he is getting a good deal of money—at least, I suppose Colonel Stuart would give him a respectable sum—he still lives as if he were as poor as he could be. His name is Spendir; but you must understand how he lives, and how rarely he makes a purchase, before you can fully appreciate the dainty irony of the name. Fitz Spendir—isn't it an odd name altogether? He, too, is a widower, I presume (not that any one in Highshire knows or cares about it), for he has a little boy who calls him father; a boy quite as old as Jack Esdaile, so that the father must have been tremendously young—I mean very young—when he married, for he can not be above thirty now. There are only two cottages in Nether Lane, side by side," Marjorie continued, lightly, "and they are such a contrast now. The woman who lives in one is a widow, though a perfect old maid for neatness and primness and acidity. Poor thing! she has had a cloud upon her way for years, and I do not mean to complain of her. Her home is a picture of order, and contains more of every thing than she can possibly need through her life-time; whereas Mr. Spendir's is bare and bleak and desolate, containing only just meagre necessaries; but to make up, there are book-shelves and pictures and chiffoniers, and things actually *painted* on the walls, to represent real furniture. I rather like the idea—don't you? A queer life they seem to live there, the father and son, with no womankind to look after them, no one to do any thing for either of them but the other."

"Perhaps their neighbor helps them," suggested Lina.

"Mrs. Cheere helps them!" echoed Marjorie, laughing. "Why, they wage perpetual guerrilla warfare! She considers it an insult that they were allowed to have the cottage next to hers, and she scolds at them—she would not condescend even to scold *to* them—at every opportunity. I take a great interest in them, Miss Chester," added Marjorie, rather gravely; "and I long to know how they manage, and if they are very wretched."

"Do they look so?" questioned Lina.

"No, I think not. Of course the house looks very odd and comfortless; but the artist is not peculiar at all, and the boy, though a rather strong contrast to bright little petted Jack Esdaile, is not more odd than many other boys about Churchill. I got Colonel Stuart to take me, and introduce me, and show me the pictures, because I inherit my mother's curiosity—Eve's, of course, I mean—and I remember how chilly the room felt when the mystery of its furniture was laid bare. Yet I have a more vivid remembrance of it than of many handsome rooms. There was a rather barren tea-table, a hungry boy, a great gray cat, and a restless, satirical, bearded man. By-the-way, would you like to go, Miss Chester, and see these sketches, which we all are expected to be interested in?"

"Very much," assented Lina.

"Then let me take you. But I forgot to tell you that Mr. Spendir sings beautifully—he certainly doesn't paint beautifully, so do not think him a paragon; I have not only heard of it, but I have really heard him. I was told one night that Mrs. Cheere—the woman who lives next door—was ill, so I went to see her. While I was there, I heard a man's voice singing in a kind of lazy, desultory way, as if the man himself were very busy—you know that sort of singing. I listened at once, eager to hear. Oh, it *was* singing! And what do you think it was?—Mendelssohn's 'If with all your hearts;' and—and—" Miss Castillain stammered a little, as she wondered whether it was fancy which had brought that strange, still look of pain into Lina's eyes—"and of course you would have thought then that he was goody, or classical, or something of that kind; but I had no sooner left Dorcas's cottage, on purpose that I might linger outside and hear more, than he went straight off into 'Somebody's courting somebody.' Colonel Stuart came up just then, and we stopped together to hear. I was not disappointed in the change of air," added the girl, laughing, "because that last was such a pleasant assurance, wasn't it?"

"Why?" asked Lina, absently.

"Why? I should have thought, being a woman, you would have seen the consolation of it. If nobody was courting any body, the world would be so very neutrally tinted; don't you think so? The finished way in which he sung even that was rare," added Marjorie, watching intently the wistful expression on Lina's face, "particularly rare in these parts. But how long I am staying! You will go with me there, and to other places, I hope. I should like you to give me as much of your time as you can, and will. It will be but little, I know, as Lady Athelston is very exacting with every one on whom she is dependent."

"You mean on those who are dependent upon her?" asked Lina, a little proudly, yet sadly.

"No, I mean what I said. She will soon grow to be entirely dependent upon you. Any one with a strong will, or indeed with any will at all, can wind her round their little finger. And so her conduct depends entirely on whose little finger she is round *pro tem.* His mother's incapacity is some slight excuse for Neil. He has had no advantages of early training, or of home influence, or whatever people call it. In that he is to be pitied, but in nothing else. How do you get on with the trumpet?"

"Pretty well, I think," replied Lina, smiling.

"That's right; but of course you would. Now, I make perpetual blunders. Only the other day, when I was tired to death of bawling to her, and, to relieve myself, said aside to Neil what a bore it was, I found I had not taken my mouth from the trumpet; so each word was uttered right into her ear. Can you imagine my sensations when she slowly laid down her trumpet and began to weep? You will never commit such blunders as that, and I am sure you will soon gain a good influence over her. Shall you think me impertinent if I give you just one word of warning?"

"I shall think you very kind," said Lina, truthfully.

"Do not ever be taken into the confidence of Mr. Jelfrey, or allow him to patronize you; and do not ditto ditto as regards Lady Athelston's maid."

"I do not think I shall ever feel inclined to do either," replied Lina, promptly.

"That is all right, then. You will soon feel at home here, and, whatever friends you may make, you will always, I hope, look upon me as one of the most—what?—one of the oldest, at all events. Do not look sad. High Athelston

is a splendid place to live in, and there are no more snakes in the grass of this park than of many others. But it is easy to be brave and hopeful for each other, isn't it? And you will say that neither you nor I, though we stand here so pleasantly, know the bitterness of each other's heart. Never mind, it wears away at last. Now, good-bye. Tell Neil we are expecting him to-night at Hawkedale—anxiously, eagerly, wearily."

And with these words, and a bright laugh, Marjorie went away.

"I wish I could have asked her a few questions," she thought, as she drove her old pony down the avenue; "but, somehow, she had a look in her face that prevented me, and that made me talk on indefatigably all the time I staid. She will think I only went to chatter. That does not signify; that is a very small mistake among the many surrounding me. I went for the purpose of trying to make her feel herself at home with me; and though I don't expect that I have succeeded—because success rarely does crown any of my efforts—still, I can not have done much harm, I think."

CHAPTER V.

NIGHT IN NETHER LANE.

All that evening there was a strange nervousness about Lina Chester, a dreamy wonder in her eyes, and an odd watchfulness and listening in every act and glance. She and Lady Athelston dined alone in the brilliant lamp-light; Martin and the twin canaries—as Marjorie Castillain called the footmen—waiting as noiselessly and deferentially as if there had been a row of guests on either side the table.

To Lina, no meal had ever seemed so long before; but at last the dessert was on the table, and she caught herself looking across into Lady Athelston's face with eager anxiety. But Lady Athelston only sipped her wine, and played languidly with the forced fruits which had cost so much labor and expense. So the minutes passed.

"Did you look out that account of the wedding for me, Miss Chester?" she asked at last; and Lina nodded with a smile. An answering smile broke in Lady Athelston's sleepy eyes, and the girl rejoiced to see it.

"Then we will go." And she rose, and took Lina's arm to cross the hall.

"Now, you shall arrange my patchwork," she added, complacently, as she took her seat beside the drawing-room fire, "and I will read this to myself after tea."

Lina's heart beat joyfully. For Lady Athelston to read any thing to herself meant for her to sleep long and soundly.

Under Lina's dexterous fingers, the many-colored diamonds formed themselves artistically; all the better it seemed for the nervous haste of the little hands. The twin canaries brought in the tea, and Lina prepared Lady Athelston's, sipping her own afterward as if with an effort. The trays were carried away; Lady Athelston read a few sentences; and then Lina, watching her anxiously, saw her drop calmly into one of those unruffled sleeps which a book invariably induced for her.

For a few moments the girl sat quite motionless, watching her; then she rose, and walked noiselessly out of the room. Her very breath was held as she ran up the lighted staircase, where her footfall made no sound, and she started back, trembling from head to foot, when, close to her own room door, she came upon Lady Athelston's hawk-eyed maid.

"You are in haste, Miss Chester? Can I assist you?"

"No, thank you," answered Lina, nervously; "I have a headache, and I am going to my room."

"I am sorry, miss," replied Fletcher, regarding her very keenly. "What shall I bring you?"

"Nothing, please—nothing, thank you," faltered Lina; "I only wish to rest, and to be alone."

"My lady is tiring to be with long. I am sure you find her so," insinuated "my lady's" faithful maid.

"I am not tired, only—ill," replied Lina, unconsciously contradicting herself, as she passed on into her own room.

With rapid fingers she changed her evening dress for a black one; then, with quickly beating heart, stood a moment listening. No sound; and she opened her door, and crept down a side staircase, and through the arched west door, near which Sir Neil had waited for her that afternoon. Down the steps, from terrace to terrace, she glided; then crossed the park and gained the path which led toward the limes and the rookery.

Hastening along this, Lina never glanced around her in the darkness until she reached the green door among the trees, which led from the park into Nether Lane. Hastily she drew the bolt, and passed out into the gloomy little road, weird and shadowy even in daylight, but now in dense and utter darkness.

Though she trembled as did the spring leaves above her, Lina went steadily on, until she saw a light glimmering in the upper window of a cottage standing back from the lane. Her eyes were accustomed to the darkness now, and the shadow of the trees was passed, so she could distinguish that two houses were built together, and that the one farther from High Athelston was in darkness.

"That light must be in the woman's bedroom," she said, noiselessly lifting the latch of the garden-gate. "Then this is the right one, and the shutters are shut."

There was not a sound of the girl's cautious footsteps on the gravel, but a little cry of joy escaped her when she saw that, where the shutters should have met, a ray of light shone out into the night. Leaning with trembling hands upon the window-sill, Lina gazed eagerly through that slit in the imperfectly fitting shutters, from which the light crept through to touch her warmly. There was no blind to the window, and she could see a portion of the bare little room, made distinct and bright by the clear, pale light of a paraffine lamp.

Full in this light, a boy of nine or ten sat at a small table, on which a cloth was laid, with two cups and saucers. His head was bent over a book, and Lina could hear the monotonous, childish voice. The sound made her heart throb, as it proved that some one else was in the room—some one to whom he must be reading She

listened eagerly, hungering for another voice; but no sound interrupted the steady and wearisome flow of the reading.

She watched the little figure on its stiff chair, the long delicate face, the ruffled hair, the thin hand and wrist which the coat-sleeve did not cover. Every item was learned off by heart; and then again came the searching gaze around the lighted room, as far as her eyes could grasp it. No other figure came within her sight; for a long time no other voice sounded; and she grew chill and dispirited, though she never stirred, or faltered in her steadfast purpose.

But at last a voice came from the farther end of the room—the voice, evidently, of a man who was busy and engrossed—and the few quick words made every nerve in Lina's frame quiver painfully.

"Put that book away now, Jet. We have had enough food for our minds to-night."

"Don't you like the book, father?" the small voice asked, earnestly.

"Greatly, immensely—pretty well," quoted the quick, engrossed voice; "but I like 'Crusoe' better. Where did you pick up that thrilling gem?"

"I bought it in a shop-window with my Saturday penny, dad."

"Oh! I see—the mortgaged penny for next Saturday week. Now, make the coffee. I shall not be long."

The boy put away his book, and, taking a coffee-pot from the hob, put it on the fire. After intently watching it as the coffee boiled fine, he went back to his old seat, and, apparently glad of a change of occupation, took a comb from his pocket, wrapped it in paper, and began to perform upon it. Not a soothing or harmonious music would this instrument produce at any time, but now it made Lina's head ache acutely. Still she staid on, her ears strained to listen for that other voice, her eyes strained to see another form.

She followed "Poor Mary Ann" to her grave. She sojourned for an indefinite period "In my cottage near a wood." She listened while, for an endless time, "The Heavens were telling." She would have grown really feverish in her anxiety, only that a whistle now and then joined in with the air, a man's whistle, clear and true; and when the child—to whom time was rather a stumbling-block—made a worse than ordinary mistake, the cheery voice stopped him and put him right.

"Plenty, Jet," it called at last, as the boy ended a melancholy strain. "Isn't it rather headachy?"

"I like it, dad, and you are not ready for supper."

"Like it, do ye? Well, go on. Tune up."

Again the whistle joined in with its cheering effect—improvising variations now—and Lina listened without weariness. But as the whistling became more energetic and florid, the comb attempted more energy and floridness too, and she felt that presently she should have to hold her head.

"Suppose you get your violin, and practice properly for a few minutes, Jet. That will do you good," put in the pleasant, busy voice again.

"Oh, dad," pleaded the boy, fretfully, "it makes my ears ache so."

"Peculiar ears. Then suppose you dish up the herrings?"

"They are *so* small, dad," commented the boy, dismally, as he pursued again his culinary performances at the fire. "I could eat both of them myself."

"I could eat half a dozen," was the ready answer; "but, then, it's wicked to overtax one's digestive powers. So, under those circumstances, two are enough for both of us."

"When the woman came to sell them, you said you only bought two because you hadn't change, dad," insisted the boy, with a child's desire to understand the motives of his elders.

"Of course I did. How could I possibly tell that she would not run away forever with a ten-pound note, if I gave it to her to change?"

A laugh, keen and slight, followed the words, and Lina leaned forward more and more eagerly.

"I expect they're done, dad," said the boy, gravely examining the fish.

"Baste them a little, old fellow. I shall not be more than two minutes now."

"Only two minutes now," echoed Lina below her breath.

"Come, father, I'm sure they're done," whined the lad, with a certain patient tiredness unusual in a child's voice and face. "Come, and look."

"Oh, nonsense! You know whether they are done, quite as well as I do myself."

"They are bubbling into bladders. Do let us have supper now, dad. I am so sleepy and so hungry, and it is such a while since tea, and I had not very much then."

"Jet, you are one of those peculiar lads gifted with eternal appetite," was the answer, in a tone which was so full of widely different thoughts that Lina read a whole story in the words—a story of regret, of longing, of hopelessness, yet of wide kindliness and love.

"Now I am ready."

Lina heard a chair pushed back on the boarded floor, and then a figure sauntered into her sight. For an instant she started back, a quick breath, almost a cry, escaping her parted lips; then she was quite still again in her old position.

"For what we are going to receive, O Lord, make us thankful. Amen."

She saw the two sit down after the simple grace, and share the herrings exactly between them—one for the big, strong, hungry man, one for the hungry child. She saw the little hands pour out the coffee deftly. She heard the merry words that passed between the two. She saw the faces sometimes smiling merrily, and sometimes catching a grave and lonely look which did not seem new to either. She remembered the abundant, luxurious dinner which she had left untasted a few hours before. She pictured the rich, warm rooms to which she would return; and as she did so, the little bare room before her grew dim and misty, and, with her hands clasped and her tearless sobs suffocating her, she turned away before the anguished words forced themselves again and again through her white lips.

"Oh, why did he come—why did he come? Only four years—only four. My God! I feel as if the fear would kill me!"

Lina never remembered her walk back to High Athelston that night, until, when she opened the gate among the firs, she came suddenly upon Sir Neil walking toward her. The kind and pitiful darkness hid her face from his inquisitive gaze,

and she schooled her voice to calmness as best she could.

"I came to meet you, Miss Chester," he began at once. But he waited in vain for a reply. They were walking together now, side by side, along the gravel path; and Neil, though he tried to loiter with her, felt obliged to quicken his steps to keep up with hers.

"Jelfrey is here; he came up Nether Lane; so you understand how I knew where you were. Miss Chester," Neil added, in the wooing tones which he generally found irresistible; "why did you not let me walk with you? I would have been home from Hawkedale in good time, if you had only hinted such a wish to me."

"I preferred going alone, thank you, Sir Neil."

"But about here," rejoined Sir Neil, a little angrily, "ladies do not walk in the lanes alone after night-fall."

In her utter incapacity for excusing herself, Lina felt her voice grow hot and angry, and she hastened her steps still more.

"Miss Chester," pleaded Neil, keeping beside her, "will you promise me not to go again? I wish you to feel yourself under my care, as—as any young-lady guest at High Athelston would be. And I can always be at your service, in the dark or daylight. Will you promise me?"

"I am used to being alone, and I should only break such a promise if I made it," rejoined Lina, rather tremulously.

"I think I have a right to this," said the baronet, now really provoked.

"I do not think so, Sir Neil."

"At any rate," he interrupted, throwing away his half-smoked cigar with a gesture of impatience, "my mother, I suppose, has such a right; and I hope she will exercise it."

"Let me go in, please," entreated Lina, while her hands ached in their strained clasp.

"*I* did not tempt you out into the night and cold and darkness," said Sir Neil, with an angry scorn which frightened her; "and *now* you force me to believe Jelfrey, when he says that this walk of yours was not one in which you would care for a companion."

"I do not understand Mr. Jelfrey's suspicions," answered Lina, proudly. "I would not care even to try to do so."

And then she passed him, and entered the house with a cool, slow step.

"Did I make a fool of myself, or rather did she make a fool of me?" he soliloquized. "Of course, I lose my advantage by showing how much I care for her words. I wish I could keep cool through every thing, as Jelfrey can. But I act like an idiot by letting my temper get the better of me when I fail to move her. And she so calm and cool!"

Calm and cool! Would he have said it if he had seen Lina take off her black dress with feverish fingers, and with hot tears in her eyes?

Calm and cool! He might have said it a few minutes afterward, if he had seen her enter the drawing-room in her white dress, and pass Eustace Jelfrey as if he had been invisible.

CHAPTER VI.

MARJORIE'S HOME.

Lady Athelston's low phaeton stood on the gravel sweep, and the two fat ponies in their glittering harness waited resignedly for Lina to take the reins and let them trot stolidly down the avenue. But she would not take her seat until Lady Athelston had appeared, and settled herself—a lengthened performance generally—upon her cushions.

Lina stood a little aside now, waiting for her; and as she stood so, Sir Neil came from the house and joined her.

"How seriously you have been looking over to the hills, Miss Chester! Were you wishing to drive thither instead of to Hawkedale?"

"I think I was," replied Lina, smiling. "The sunlight lies so warm and bright there."

"You have never been to the hills, have you?" questioned Neil, with an eagerness in his tone which he tried in vain to hide. "Will you come to-day, after lunch?"

"Not to-day, thank you, Sir Neil," answered Lina as gently as she could.

"Why not to-day? Why must I always be refused?" he asked, the hot blood rising to his face.

"Lady Athelston said she would take me some day; so she of course will arrange when it shall be."

"Are you going to pin all your wishes and desires to Lady Athelston's cap-strings?" interrupted Lady Athelston's son, pettishly. "Surely you have a will of your own?"

"Yes," replied Lina, with quiet coolness. "I have a will of my own."

"If my mother takes it into her head to do the honors of our hills herself," said Neil, trying to speak lightly and pleasantly again, "I know she will be glad of my help and company; she always is; and we will make a picnic. I will help her to show you the celebrated spots among the Highshire hills. You do not thank me, Miss Chester; you do not even assent to my proposal, or acknowledge my wish to please you," he went on, with impatience; "but it can not be that you really dislike me, for you have no cause. I have always been — been anxious to win your regard, and I can hardly yet have seriously displeased you in any way. You will not always be so distant and disagreeable—I beg your pardon; but I believe you wish to be, and would be, if such a thing were really possible to you."

"I think, Sir Neil," said Lina, a tremor in her low voice as she tried to speak with easy indifference, "if you had been kind and courteous to your mother's companion from the first, because she came a stranger and alone to your house; if, when you knew I was unprotected, and felt I was —was inferior to the ladies to whom you would naturally and willingly show deference, or even mere politeness, you had shown me just a little consideration and courtesy — instead of placing me at once, and in the presence even of your servant, in the insignificant position which it evidently seemed to you my only right to fill, I would have believed your wish, expressed since then, that I should be happy and at home here. But I never can think of that, because the first impression fixed itself so deeply on my mind; and I know that your politeness to me now must be an effort. So—"

"Oh, Miss Chester! do believe me—" interrupted Neil.

But she spoke on, still gravely:

"So I choose to maintain now, Sir Neil, just the position in which your reception placed me. This must be always so."

"What do you mean, Miss Chester?" he cried, excitedly. "Do you really resent, so cruelly, my hasty words in the station on the night you arrived?"

"I could not help hearing them," she answered, simply, "and I can not help remembering them."

"Can I not blot them from your memory by all my respect, my admiration, my—"

Lina interrupted him quietly.

"You have not done so yet, Sir Neil. You knew that I was waiting there, alone and tired and cold; not a lady visitor to High Athelston, to be met and welcomed generously; only Lady Athelston's new companion, a kind of servant, whose duty it was to wait until they chose to send from the inn, and with whom you had nothing to do, while your cares were all devoted to your dogs. Is it odd that I remember this, and think sometimes how ignorantly I have fancied other than this the conduct of a gentleman? The word is a pleasant word, Sir Neil, and one's thoughts give it a meaning, perhaps, which is incorrect."

"These words of yours are unjust and cruel," said Neil, with angry emphasis; "you make no allowance for me. You never imagine how different from *you* have been all my mother's—"

"Hush, please," interrupted Lina, "there is no need to bring others into the conversation. I have no wish to learn now, so late, that politeness is not due to all women."

"Still your words are positively unjust," persisted Neil, vehemently. "Tell me one thing, are you so proud to me because—because they have told you of my engagement to Miss Castillain?"

Lina raised her eyes to his in simple, slow surprise; and under their gaze the scarlet rushed to the roots of his hair.

"If I *am* engaged, I may ask you to be friendly with me, to—like me, and not to spurn me when I— By Heaven! I do not know what to say, for I—I admire you with all my heart and soul; and I do not believe 'admire' is the right word, after all."

The half-frightened, half-angry darkening of Lina's eyes, still fixed upon his face, could not stop the unkind, impetuous words. Before they were all uttered, she had moved slowly away.

"Miss Chester," he cried, in a low, anxious whisper, "stay, please stay!"

She half turned. Within twenty yards the servants stood about the carriage, and Lina, always thoughtful, knew they would wonder, and make their own comments on his eagerness.

So they sauntered on, side by side, easy and careless; though Neil, still feeling the hot blood tingle in his face, tilted his hat as low as he could over his eyes.

"I suppose you will be away now all morning," he remarked, moodily; "and you would not give those sleepy little beasts one extra cut, if I were to beg it of you from now until you start."

"Not one."

The behavior of Sir Neil Athelston should not make her unhappy—not more unhappy, at least, than she could help. He should not even see that it had any effect at all, except—except just to prove that no words of his could move her, or make her forget for one minute the position she occupied in his house; the position which he had tacitly assigned to her before he saw her.

"Do make haste home though, really," he urged; "I have nothing to do, and shall be looking out for you."

"Nothing to do!" she echoed. "You are to be pitied, indeed, Sir Neil."

"I suppose you would not have me go about among my men and ask them to let me do their work for them, would you, Miss Chester?" he asked, laughing. "There is not one of them who has enough to occupy himself, not to speak of occupying an able-bodied fellow like me, too; and I have no business of my own to transact this morning. Somehow, the new early-rising system leaves the middle of the day bare of employment. I have a few letters to write, but they will soon be done; and then I shall only be wanting you to come back. You look very grave, Miss Chester, but really I can not be what you seem to insinuate I ought to be. I can not descend to the level of a bee, and improve the shining hours. Man's a rational animal, you know. And do you think that even the little busy bee would be such a little busy fool as to gather honey all the day unless he wanted it? Till I feel such a want, I will avoid such an exertion. Now, Miss Chester, own that that is plain common sense."

"There is Lady Athelston," she said, hastening on, and avoiding any answer to his silly speech.

"Neil, are *you* coming?" exclaimed his mother, astonished as she saw him leaning against the phaeton.

"Not quite," he answered, laughing; "your funereal pace is rather more than a human being endowed with only ordinary patience can stand."

"I do not like driving fast," rejoined Lady Athelston, deprecatingly. "You will not forget that, will you, Miss Chester?" she added, turning to Lina her sleepy eyes almost piteously.

Lina nodded, with her beautiful, grave smile, and took the ponies on at a walk; while Neil, looking as if he could have heartily laughed at himself the while, strolled on down the avenue at his mother's side.

"You might come with us," she urged, pathetically; "you so seldom come with me, Neil."

The words stopped him at once. He raised his hat with a laugh, though his eyes gravely waited for Lina's recognition of his glance.

"Give my love to the Misses Castillain," he said, in a light aside to her; and then he turned from the avenue, and sauntered on in idleness till he was summoned into the house to receive visitors.

Lina Chester looked about her with interest, as well as curiosity, when they reached Hawkedale. She remembered all that Marjorie had told her with such random honesty, and she felt anxious to see the home of this girl who had been so friendly with her.

In the great dingy drawing-room into which Lady Athelston and Lina were ushered there sat a gentleman and two ladies. One of these ladies rose at once, greeting Lady Athelston delighted-

ly as she led her to a chair. She was a girl of about Lina's age, with a narrow, handsome face, pointed features, very fair hair dressed to hang low on her neck, and two real beauties in a pair of tiny shell-like ears, and finely shaped white hands. Louisa Castillain was wont to boast that she possessed all those beauties which are the symbols of high birth. "The symbols are fallible," Marjorie used to say, with ready spite. "My birth is, unfortunately, the same as yours, and I possess none of the labels of aristocracy. No water in the world would be persuaded to run steadily under my instep; and my ears are as ugly as Mozart's. What a bad thing, isn't it, that we can not entirely lose the taint of plebeianism we inherit from our gardener grandfather—Adam?"

"It *is* kind of you to have come," Louisa Castillain said, impressively, as she took Lady Athelston's parasol. "And not long ago, do you know, we were talking of you."

"Gushing, eh?" remarked Marjorie to Lina, without troubling herself to lower her voice.

"Miss Castillain—Miss Chester," began Lady Athelston, introducing the girls in her gentle, sleepy voice. And Louisa, half turning to the "companion," gave her a slow, slight bow.

"Miss Marjorie Castillain — Miss Chester," she went on; "Miss Chester—Mr. Jelfrey."

To Lady Athelston's surprise, Marjorie promptly and warmly took Lina's hand.

"I have the advantage of Louisa," she said into Lady Athelston's trumpet; "I have seen Miss Chester before. I called upon her at High Athelston, and we are friends already — lasting ones, I hope."

Was it Lady Athelston's surprised glance only, or was it Mr. Jelfrey's, which prompted Marjorie to say this? The words were certainly addressed to Lady Athelston; but Marjorie's defiant eyes were fixed on Eustace Jelfrey as she finished speaking, and under their gaze he colored a little, and perhaps wished that he, too, had offered his hand to Lady Athelston's companion, instead of frigidly following Miss Castillain's example. Perhaps to make up for this, perhaps from a secret motive of his own, he took up his station within easy speaking distance of Lina, addressing various remarks to her, which she received and answered with a quiet indifference. Lady Athelston talked on placidly from her large chair, and Louisa hovered about her, or sat on a low chair near, using every power of entertainment which she possessed.

"Worshiping according to her lights," as Marjorie said aside to Lina and Mr. Jelfrey.

"Marjorie," said Louisa, turning and facing her with pathetic displeasure, "I fear you forget you are in the presence of affliction. "Don't you think it would be more Christian, as well as more lady-like, to remember dear Lady Athelston's deafness?"

It struck more than Lina that this speech, so pointed and so clearly uttered, was intended particularly for the deaf ears; but Marjorie answered it as cheerfully, if not as gratefully, as if it had been the kindest and most sisterly bit of advice. Then she turned again to Lina, with a sigh of relief.

"If you and Mr. Jelfrey had not been here, I should have quarreled with her outright."

"We are unfortunate, indeed, in having marred your enjoyment, Miss Marjorie," said Jelfrey, gazing at her in curious surprise and keen admiration.

The handsome tutor was wont to say that Marjorie Castillain wanted form and repose; yet no eyes followed her every movement with the covert eagerness with which his did; no ears drank in her pleasant words as thirstily as his.

"I am very cautious about what people think of me," exclaimed Marjorie, demurely, "and so I never fight Louisa in public. Besides, we should have no chance, Mr. Jelfrey—I and Miss Chester, against you and my sister."

"You understand, then, exactly how we should divide?"

"Exactly," assented Marjorie, with promptness. "I understand, too, how terribly dangerous such a conjunction would be for us! You have no idea, Miss Chester, of the strength of Louisa's pretty little hand, or of the exquisite skill she exhibits in selecting one's weakest points for attack."

"And I, Miss Marjorie?" asked Jelfrey, with a smile of feigned reproach.

"You?" deliberated Marjorie, with inimitable *sang-froid*. "Oh! I don't know about you, because you have weapons at your command which I don't understand."

"Then you consider," he said, his manner a little embarrassed, "that the united cause of yourself and Miss Chester would come to grief?"

"Yes. Lady Athelston," Marjorie continued, sauntering to her chair and leaning over the back, as she spoke quietly into the elevated trumpet, "are you tired of Louisa yet?"

"Tired, dear!" she echoed, astonished.

"Yes; because when you are, please to mention it, as Louisa is not fanciful, and will never imagine such a case. When you are, Mr. Jelfrey wants to tell you one or two items of news he has gleaned for our benefit. What do you think is one?"

"What?" asked her listener, eagerly.

"That Colonel Stuart—he did not hear it from Colonel Stuart himself, but that never makes *any* difference — has made an offer to Lady Helen Burton, and been refused."

"Not true," returned Lady Athelston, promptly and decisively. "He has never even admired her."

"But, dear Lady Athelston, what has that to do with it?" inquired Marjorie, opening her frank brown eyes in comical surprise. "You don't understand the love-making of the nineteenth century so well as I do. If I see a gentleman and lady treating each other with systematic indifference, I am pretty sure that they have chosen each other out of all the world. If their indifference amounts to neglect, then I am sure they would die for each other. And if I see a gentleman paying attention to a lady, I am equally sure he is in love with her—mother, or aunt, or any other relation."

Some note in Marjorie's voice gave this speech a tone of bitter earnestness which two at least of her listeners detected, though only one could appreciate the irony of the last sentence. Yet all the while her face was full of irrepressible mirth, and her eyes had the comical look of a child who, enjoying the mischief it has done, waits in timid expectation of the punishment.

"I shall tell Neil your opinion of *his* love-

making," said Lady Athelston, not without vexation in her voice, though she smiled; "Miss Chester, you are witness."

"Don't bring Miss Chester in," entreated Marjorie, hastily. "If one girl forms an opinion from her own experience, it is very unjust that another—whose experience is likely to have been widely different—should have to indorse it."

"*I* should be very sorry to have to indorse it," said Miss Castillain, looking slowly and smilingly round. "I find that the gentlemen of the nineteenth century know exactly how to pay attention in the most acceptable and agreeable manner."

This speech, though deposited in Lady Athelston's trumpet, was intended for another destination too, and evidently reached it. Mr. Jelfrey bowed with a courteous, pleasant smile.

"Being the only representative of the sex present," he said, "my unworthy thanks are all your kind words can win, Miss Castillain. And I hope you agree with me in thinking that the men of the nineteenth century—with the men of the eighteen previous centuries—are influenced in their love-making (I will retain your sister's word) by the conduct of the ladies to whom they are making the love. I hope you think this, and that Miss Chester, at any rate, thinks so too."

He looked a very handsome and intelligent specimen of the nineteenth-century man when he spoke, and Lina's eyes were riveted upon him, while the color slowly rose in her face at his words.

"Is she assenting to his words or denying them?" mused Marjorie. "Is she angry with *him*, or with some one of whom his words remind her?"

"Have I any right to ask you, Miss Marjorie," concluded Mr. Jelfrey, rather earnestly, "what reason you have for thinking us either cold or deceitful?"

"I have no other but a woman's reason: I think you so because I think you so."

Marjorie's eyes, so gravely mischievous, went back to their quiet observation of Lina, until Lady Athelston looked up and touched the round arms that were crossed on the back of her chair.

"I only want you not to pretend that you speak from experience, my dear," she said. "We can take all your nonsense for what it is worth, if you won't tell a direct falsehood. *You* can not meet with coldness from one you love, or deceit from one who loves you."

"Can't I?" laughed Marjorie, while the red flamed in her face with a vivid suddenness. "Why not?"

"Because all those things have been arranged for you, and there is no deficiency in your courtship."

"Oh, none!" rejoined Marjorie, raising her eyes sublimely.

"You and Neil are sure to agree entirely about that sort of thing," resumed Lady Athelston, graciously; "you are both just the persons to win attention and admiration."

"Listen, ye shades!" cried the girl. "I don't know about Neil," she added, her laughing lips again at the trumpet, "but I am 'just the person' to win nobody's attention and admiration, etc.; but if I ever did, it would be those of 'just the person' I never could care for. Is not that a bad state of affairs, Lady Athelston?"

"It is partly Marjorie's own fault that people see no good qualities in her," put in Louisa, seeing nothing of the stern compression of Jelfrey's lips. "She will not even make a little show in society. I don't mind what she does here at home with me; but I think she owes it to society to show some different feeling. I hear many people say she is not at all like a Castillain."

"Tidings of hope," put in Marjorie.

"But," resumed Louisa, pityingly, "like some uncouth peasant-girl dressed up."

"Any peasant-girl who could 'dress up' on my allowance would be a prodigy quite worthy of my imitation," said Marjorie, good-humoredly.

"You have the same as I have, dear," rejoined Louisa, looking up innocently from her low seat.

"Don't let us discuss that," interposed her sister, with sudden gravity. "We have bickered enough, and on that subject I rarely keep my temper, especially when you call me 'dear.' Lady Athelston, if you'll ask me, I'll go back with you to High Athelston."

This was speedily arranged, very much to Lady Athelston's satisfaction, and more still to Lina's.

"Yet I don't know exactly why I like her," she mused to herself, thinking of Marjorie, and unconsciously repeating the words. "I see Mr. Jelfrey is in a state of hot vexation at her going. I suppose it is a holiday for him, and he is spending it here; but he will stay and solace himself with her sister, I dare say. *She* will not hasten him away. Yes, he *is* playing a double game."

From the back of the phaeton—for she could not be induced to take Lina's place—Marjorie Castillain talked cheerfully to Lady Athelston; almost entirely upsetting Lina's gravity now and then by an aside, always funny, though never malicious; quite aloud and placidly uttered, yet certainly not intended for Lady Athelston's ears. It was a pleasant drive for them all, and it was a pleasant surprise to find Colonel Stuart with Sir Neil when they reached High Athelston.

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

Colonel Stuart and Marjorie were both persuaded to stop for the day; but the colonel only did so on condition that the young people would walk with him in the afternoon to the cottages in Nether Lane, as he had an appointment with the artist who was living there.

"Lady Athelston, may I ask you to spare Miss Chester for an hour or two?" he said.

"I think—I think Lady Athelston will be sure—to want me," stammered Lina, with that frightened, shrinking look which was not new to her.

"Oh, you must come," said Marjorie, with a decision which was very gentle and quiet in all its fun, "if it is only just for the pleasure of comparing this call with the one you made this morning. Why, you won't hear so much scandal talked there through all the afternoon—if you stay—as you heard Louisa and me pour into

Lady Athelston's ear during the first ten minutes she was in our house."

"Miss Chester, I am sure, is not a worshiper of the Blatant Beast," said Colonel Stuart, with a smile for Lina.

"That, Miss Chester," explained Marjorie, with a quick flash of pain in her eyes, "is scandal—slander in Spenser's old English, but scandal in modern English, a more pettifogging word, and more appropriate. We are great gossips at Hawkedale, and gossip always degenerates into scandal."

"I know an old lady who encourages you finely," put in Neil, shrugging his shoulders with an amused glance at his mother.

"And I know a young gentleman who encourages us finely too," said Marjorie in the same tone; "but whether it's Colonel Stuart, or Sir Neil Athelston, or Mr. Jelfrey, I won't tell."

"Why don't you say 'One of the three; I won't say which, but it is not Colonel Stuart, or you, Neil, like the boy and his grandmother and the cat? We should not understand it a bit better than we do now," laughed the young baronet.

"Thoroughly in the dark," retorted Marjorie, audaciously. "You will come?" she added to Lina, almost appealingly.

"I am rather surprised at *your* willingness to go, Miss Marjorie," said the colonel. "It is not a week since you told me that paying calls to strangers was a species of day-mare, worse to you than any nightmare."

"But I called on Miss Chester after that," returned Marjorie, lightly, "and I found it so pleasant that I changed my mind. By-the-way, Colonel Stuart, will you tell her how you first met with Mr. Spendir? I believe I told her every thing about him except that, and that I forgot."

Lina moved a little apart from them all, and nervously took Lady Athelston's work from the table. Neil's eyes followed her.

"How bored she looks at the idea of hearing the history of this precious artist!" he thought.

"I was in the Strand one day, when in London, Miss Chester," said the colonel, using but few words for his story, "and a photograph exposed for sale took my fancy. While I waited in the shop, I could not help hearing a gentleman—shabby enough, but still a gentleman—urgently requesting the master of the shop to purchase from him a few original sketches. I listened for a good while, my heart literally aching for the poor fellow; then, instead of buying the photograph, I took Mr. Spendir's sketches. Afterward, when I wanted an artist to illustrate my father's book, I remembered him. That's all. No wonder Miss Marjorie forgot, was it?"

"Had he been painting all his life, and never sold a picture before?" asked Marjorie, showing no sign in her voice of the pity with which she had spoken of this artist to Lina only a few days before.

"No. He told me he had been accustomed to gain a livelihood—a very good livelihood—by his voice, but that it had failed him, and that the possibility of that was over—over, I hope, only for a time."

Lina's hands had dropped the work now, and her eyes were wide and hot. It seemed to her that every one in the room was intently and questioningly watching her.

"What a much jollier life that must have been for him than this one is!"

A very grave look Colonel Stuart gave Marjorie when she said this.

"Perhaps he may have other ideas of the 'jollier life'—you chose the term, Miss Marjorie, so pardon my adopting it—but this life may be as good a one, don't you think?"

"Depends," returned Marjorie, with random thoughtlessness, "on his receipts and disbursements."

And the instant the words had left her lips she could have cried out in anger with herself. Why was it that he always made her ashamed of herself—made her feel herself heartless and worldly? Why must she always show her worst to him, whatever different intentions she might have had? Why could she never help it?

But whatever Marjorie felt, she showed nothing of it in his presence. She would never, she said to herself, show him that his words could influence her in any way. She never would show him that she cared for his approbation—never. How could she? when he treated her with calm and never-varying coldness, often amounting, she fancied, to contempt. What did it matter to him how much of her words were felt and how much feigned? She would never condescend to make it plain to *him*. This was Marjorie's decision, often and often repeated; always acted upon. Others have acted—to the marring of their lives—upon just such vain, humble, contradictory thoughts.

Lady Athelston of course spared Lina when requested by so many, and the party set out together rather quietly. But as they walked on, in the beautiful sunshine of the spring afternoon, Marjorie's spirits rose to their usual buoyancy, and Lina's eyes lost their dreary, hunted look. She listened—though very, very quietly—while Colonel Stuart told her of the artist and his home, and she felt glad then that she had seen both it and him, and that nothing to-day could take her by surprise.

"An odd name, hasn't he, Miss Chester?" Sir Neil was speaking to her across Miss Castillain, as they walked in a row along the shadowy lane. "Yet Stuart says he's gentlemanly. Did you think so, Marjorie?"

"If his manners were not polished, his coat-sleeves were," replied Marjorie, with nonchalance.

"And what about his boots?" laughed Neil. "I'll wager to know a gentleman anywhere by his boots."

"His boots? Oh, they were slippers," returned Marjorie below her breath, as she screwed up her lips mysteriously. "Whisper it not in Gath; make it not a subject of conversation in Askelon; but I believe he had a paper collar."

"We might never have been aware of these things if you had not given us the benefit of your keener perceptions, Miss Marjorie," remarked Colonel Stuart, meaningly, while Neil laughed with hearty enjoyment.

"And I shouldn't wonder if he has not even paper wristbands on to-day, as you are expected, Colonel Stuart, and he will know that one or two ladies are sure to attend you."

"You are perfect in your appreciation of satire, Marjorie. Isn't she, Miss Chester?" asked Neil, only trying to win a glance or word from Lina.

"And in its use," added the colonel, quietly. "Do you see any satire, Miss Marjorie, in the old Latin proverb that says, God looks to clean, not filled, hands?"

"Not exactly," returned the girl, saucily still, "but I see an unpleasant implication that the filled and clean hands do not go together. And that makes me uncomfortably wonder about my own—and Neil's—and yours—and Miss Chester's."

And now that Marjorie had succeeded in drawing Lina into the conversation, she was content, and took but a minor part herself again, until they reached the two small white cottages lying back in the vegetable gardens.

"It is not exactly a winding avenue," remarked Neil, as he held the wicket open; "but it is bordered with stately potato-plants, and has a beautiful regularity which can not lead us astray."

By a clever manœuvre, skillfully performed while he spoke, Neil managed to place himself at Lina Chester's side, and to slacken his pace a little to make the walk beside her last longer. So it happened that they two did not enter the cottage kitchen until a few minutes after Colonel Stuart and Marjorie had done so. But Lina was not too late to catch the last few words of the colonel's courteous apology to Mr. Spendir for being later than he had arranged to be; and her heart gave a great leap as she looked at the two standing together, meeting easily and courteously, as gentlemen meet on equal ground. But one minute afterward the heart-beats ceased; the soft pink flush that had risen in her cheeks as she entered the cottage faded, and left her face paler even than its wont; the beautiful dark eyes dropped as if a sudden invisible touch had closed them; for Colonel Stuart was introducing her to the artist, and Sir Neil and Miss Castillain were standing near.

Mr. Spendir bowed, very low and very politely, and Lina—still without looking up—held out her hand to him as by some uncontrollable impulse. Neil Athelston's brows were drawn together over his angry, half-closed eyes. Marjorie's lips broke into a smile. Colonel Stuart watched the two, narrowly, keenly, almost cruelly in his intense earnestness.

Fitz Spendir, in a shabby coat stained with paint, stood opposite this girl, and clasped her hand for just one second — his breath coming quick and hard, and his lips growing white and rigid—he then turned again, easily and naturally, to show Colonel Stuart the sketch at which he had been working when they entered. When it had been thoroughly examined and criticised, the visitors moved about the room, glancing at other sketches which lay or hung about. None of them were very clever, none of them, as Neil whispered to Lina, gave proofs of a genius which would cut its way into fame. But all, as Marjorie added, exhibited talent, at any rate, and patient, painstaking earnestness.

In one corner of the room hung a small water-color drawing, before which Lina stood so long and so silently that the others left her there, and moved on. It was a very trivial work of art at best, and there were a vague unreality and incorrectness in it which would not fail to strike even a casual observer; yet a rich and harmonious blending of autumn tints redeemed it. None of the imperfections did Lina notice as she stood so long before the little picture, her hands clasped, and her eyes filled with unshed tears.

Yet it was only this. An old church-porch, with a heavy, leaning cross upon its roof. Just outside this porch, in the gravel-path, a stone that marked a grave, and on it one name only written, "Magdalen." Lina's lips moved as she read it over and over again. The two lines carved below the name she knew, even without following the words:

> "This simple stone shall bear a simple line:
> Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine."

A little aside from the gravel path stood a broken sun-dial, the long grass climbing about its base, and clinging to its worn and crumbled pedestal.

"It is an uninteresting little sketch — to a stranger, Miss Chester. I did not even paint it from nature."

The voice was only Mr. Spendir's, but Lina started as if it had reached her from the church-porch, or the grave upon which her eyes were fixed.

"From memory, I suppose?" asked Sir Neil, glancing at the sketch because Lina did so, but with intense carelessness; guessing nothing of how this painted memory was woven into the past and future history of his house.

"Yes, from memory — the memory of a description given me many years ago," answered the artist, without glancing at Sir Neil.

"You must have thought long and much of it," remarked the baronet, wishing this stupid call was over.

Then Fitz Spendir looked for the first time full into his face—into the lazy, handsome Saxon face — and answered, with a fierce and savage flash of short-lived passion in his eyes,

"I think a good deal about it still. If you ever chance to see the place, I hope you will recognize it again."

"Oh, readily," answered Sir Neil, noticing nothing odd in the speech or the speaker. "Though painted from memory, it possesses reality enough for that." And then he opened the door, and stood upon the step waiting, and pondering how he could arrange to walk beside Lina along the quiet, shadowy lane.

But the departure was not to be yet. Just as Sir Neil opened the door, a boy darted past him into the house, and pulled up breathlessly beside the artist. Curiously Lina looked from the strong, handsome, bearded face above to the narrow, young, pinched features below.

"She says—she says," stammered the child, hardly yet having seen the visitors, "that we're both scamps, and oughtn't to be allowed to live here; and then she never minds, because we're sure to be turned out soon."

"Is that Mrs. Cheere next door?" asked Marjorie, coming to the rescue with her quick, kindly tact. "Oh! she is rude to every body. It's a kind of madness. Your little boy would be sorry for her, instead of angry, Mr. Spendir, if he knew how miserable she makes herself, as well as every body else."

"The gloomy individual has rather an inappropriate name," struck in Neil, lounging a little nearer to the group as they stood ready to separate.

"Jet offended her mortally last evening," said the artist, lightly laying his hand on the child's

disheveled hair—"I'll tell you how. She is accustomed to wear two large white aprons in the house on a Sunday, one before and one behind, for the protection of her best frock—gown—dress; I don't know which she calls it. On Sunday evening she forgot, before she went to church, to take off the one that protects the back of her dress. Jet saw her as she came home, and told her of it. I don't wonder she was mortified, and vented her anger on the boy; but he can not appreciate the justice of the case."

"Is she often angry and cross with him?"

Mr. Spendir smiled a little as he answered Lina's very quiet question, perhaps amused because it was the first she had asked him.

"Very often, indeed; but what is a boy worth if he can not bear such a thing as that?"

"She is rude and cross to most with whom she comes in contact," said Colonel Stuart; "but, as Miss Castillain says, it is a kind of madness now; a madness for which she is not unblamable (though she is to be pitied), as she has brought it on herself by the fostering of a rebellious grief."

"There is some slight excuse for her," exclaimed Marjorie. "Shall I tell you, Mr. Spendir, or would you rather not hear a word about her?"

"I should like to hear it, if it excuses her," he answered. "Is it a grief which is likely to be lessened by the pursuit of a universal revenge?"

"Nearly thirty years ago," said Marjorie, smiling, "she had a little girl—an only child—in whom her whole heart was wrapped up, for her husband had died before her baby's birth. One evening she was showing the child, to amuse her, the watch and chain which had been her father's, and slipped them round her neck. 'When you are grown up,' the mother said, 'this is to be yours; but I've another present for you to-night instead;' and she gave into the little one's hand a common gilded locket, containing two plaits of hair, her father's and her mother's, with the names under. Of course the child knew no difference in the real value of the things, but still she was unwilling to have the glittering gold chain taken from her neck, and she put up her hands to keep the watch that looked so bright against her white pinafore. Just then there came a knock upon the front door, and the little girl ran delightedly to open it, anxious most probably for an opportunity of displaying her brilliant ornaments. The mother sat there waiting. She heard no voices, but, in only a few seconds, the door was shut again; and so she sat there waiting for her little girl's return. Mr. Spendir, to this very hour she seems to me to be just waiting still for her little girl's return, and just still suffering the misery of that hour."

"But how was it?" questioned Lina, with a great pity in her eyes; "was the child stolen just for the sake of the watch and chain?"

"Hardly, Miss Chester; because I should think they might have been taken from her without her making any sound that would have committed the thieves. The idea was that she was stolen partly for her own sake. She was an exceedingly pretty little girl—a beautiful, little fairy-like thing, I believe. That's five-and-twenty years ago, and such crimes were not so rare then as they are now; though even now we hear and read of them sometimes, don't we?"

"I expect the chain and watch were the real temptation," remarked Sir Neil, "and the child was an after-thought."

"And so the mother is to be excused a little of her acidity, isn't she?" asked Marjorie, turning with a smile to the artist and his boy. "As I tell you, she seems to be still always looking for her daughter; her little girl, as she calls her, though the little girl would be nearly thirty now. She has grown poor in her search. She spent all her husband's money—he was in a position above her, and married her for her beauty, though you would not guess it now—in prosecuting it in the best and most vigorous manner, and, having only a small annuity of her own left, she has had to remove from a pleasant house in Churchill to this cottage. Poor thing! one can not help pitying her, though at the same time one can not help wishing she bore her trial differently. But, after all, I pity her neighbors more than herself, knowing how terribly penetrating her temper is."

"Has she never obtained any clue to the discovery of the child, Miss Castillain?" inquired Fitz. "Does she search the papers?"

"She used to read all she could buy, but they made her so miserable she could not bear it at last."

"So now Miss Castillain takes them to her," added Sir Neil, feeling exceedingly bored by this time, and thinking to hasten the end of the narrative. "Every few days she brings a budget of papers to the fair and upright Dorcas, and after reading the cream of them all, destroys them."

"Because it seems to me," said Marjorie, flushing a little as she did when any generous act of hers—always secretly performed—was brought to light, "that I never open a newspaper without seeing first of all some account of an accident to a child. Scalded—drowned—run over—burned—shot—whatever it may be, I know that the first thing I shall light upon will be some accident to a child. But," she added, with her bright laugh, as she noticed the gravity on the faces round her, "I dare say they are many of them inventions of the—what do you call them, Neil?—penny-a-liners, isn't it?"

"I wish the accidents we read of *were* all fabrications, Miss Castillain," said Colonel Stuart, in just the tone which made Marjorie sure that she had uttered a silly and unfeeling speech—as she had done then, knowing it to be so. "And is a penny a line an irresistible temptation for untruth?"

"Our neighbor is so very disagreeable, as far as my knowledge goes, Miss Castillain," said the artist, the scarlet rising slowly in his sunburned face as he spoke to her, "that I think your going constantly to read to her and see her is a greater act of generosity than many would care to perform."

"Oh, I don't go very often," returned Marjorie, turning away the subject lightly, as she still felt the colonel's rebuke. "She does not like me to go in the mornings, when she wears her own gray hair; and I don't like going in the evenings, when she wears her brown front."

Fitz was laughing—a short, clear laugh, which was the first they had heard from him—but just at that moment Neil bent to speak to Lina in a low tone, and the laugh died shortly and suddenly on his lips. He might have heard Sir Neil's few meaningless words if he had tried; he might have seen Lina's silent and utterly indifferent reception of them; but neither of these things pre-

vented the gathering of a dark, revengeful anger in his eyes. They would all have shaken hands with him before they left, but he stood back a little, and simply bowed. Then he closed the door upon them, and sat down at once to his work again, without one glance through the window.

"Colonel Stuart," asked Marjorie, as they two walked side by side down the stiff little garden, some distance behind the others, "did it strike you that Mr. Spendir was very indifferent to Sir Neil's criticism—almost rudely so?"

"No, I think not. Was he?"

"I'm not quite sure that he really was so, because what reason could there have been? But I'm sure that the idea struck me."

Again Neil's plans were frustrated by some unperceived tact; for soon after they reached the lane, Colonel Stuart and Marjorie joined Sir Neil and Lina, and they walked on in a row again under the softly whispering leaves.

That evening was a bright and pleasant one at High Athelston. Lina began to think, what Lady Athelston had known for years, that no party could be dull of which Marjorie Castillain was one; and Lina thought too, what Lady Athelston loved to think, that Marjorie was determined to show to Sir Neil how constantly he was in her thoughts, and what a pleasure it was to her to be in his society. And to Colonel Stuart she was hotly and impatiently defiant; only now and then a glimpse of saddened regret would creep into the restless eyes after some more than usually willful reply.

And he—always courteous, yet with a certain proud independence of her provocations, which sat wonderfully well upon him in his high-bred calmness—treated her just as no one else treated her; fully, keenly appreciating her humor, as Marjorie herself knew; feeling the wholesome freshness of every one of her original or generous thoughts; seeing clearly all the good in her; yet always alive to her faults, more alive to them even than Louisa was, only so very differently! And Marjorie always knew that these faults of hers—so many that, as she told Lina, she had often tried in vain to count them during a whole morning—hurt him as they hurt no one else; hurt him just because he was good himself. And yet—and yet it was to him she always showed these faults most glaringly. It was from him she hid the few good qualities which she possessed. And it was too late now to change it all.

"Will you play to us, Marjorie dear?" asked Lady Athelston.

It was the request which the girl always expected and complied with at once; for the knowledge that Lady Athelston could not hear a note, and only asked because she knew how fond Neil was of the light, gay music which Marjorie always accorded him, did not make her hesitate for a moment. But to-night she rose very slowly, glancing comically the while into all the expectant faces.

"What shall I play?" she asked, looking at no one now; standing, tall and lithe and graceful, at the piano, with idle hands—"grave or gay?"

"Gay, of course," responded Neil, promptly.

"Grave," said Colonel Stuart, laughing.

"Conflicting orders, rather," mused Marjorie. "Please don't make any other choice, Miss Chester. Neil, you said gay, didn't you? All right; I always do what you ask me. What shall it be?"

"'Tom and Jerry.'"

She sat down slowly, and her face was hidden from them. Lina was listening for the quick, gay old tune she knew so well; but Marjorie had played for several minutes before she recognized it, so oddly was it played, with such curious pathos. Lina could hardly believe her ears. Was it "Tom and Jerry"—that slow, sad air? Yes; there was no mistake. Through the rich, slow chords and mournful harmonies ran the old melody distinctly; and yet such a wonderful and touching strain was it all, that—even though she fought with them—great, slow tears rose in her eyes.

"You chose 'Tom and Jerry,' and I like playing what you choose," remarked Marjorie, rising with an air of comical satisfaction; yet Lina fancied that on her face, too, there had been a gravity which she found it hard to chase away.

"Do you call that gay?" asked Neil.

"You did," she answered, in a quiet tone, while a laugh stole into Colonel Stuart's eyes, though he was not looking at her—a laugh that was glad and surprised.

"I wonder whether the pony-carriage is come for me," surmised Marjorie, aloud, but without addressing any one in particular. "I should be glad to think that the old folks at home would remember me sufficiently to place that antiquated vehicle at my disposal. I never was brought up to expect any thing superior to that."

"There are plenty of carriages here at your disposal, Marjorie," Neil said. "And I expect Louisa's remembering you depends a good deal on whether Jelfrey is still with her. Have they separated yet, think you?"

"She will just now," spoke Marjorie, musingly, as she glanced at the clock, "be warbling 'They wreathed my brow with gems of light.' If they did, they'd never be such idiots as to do it again, that's a comfort. And Mr. Jelfrey will presently burst into song, and entreat her to 'Oh, breathe those thrilling notes again!' which you'd naturally think meant an *encore*, but it doesn't."

"I wonder whether Mr. Castillain and your sister have any idea what you call them," said Colonel Stuart.

"Do you mean the 'Old Folks at Home?'" echoed Neil, laughing. "Why, of course they have. We all have the satisfaction of knowing that Marjorie calls us nothing worse in our absence than in our presence."

"A satisfaction, indeed!" assented the colonel, quietly.

"Yet at home they don't appreciate even that noble quality of mine," returned Marjorie, determined not to show any displeasure at his words. "It does not cause them to idolize me in the slightest—not as Emily Jorden, for instance, is idolized."

"Yet you are nicer than Emily, are you not?" inquired Neil, detecting nothing of earnestness below the girl's jesting words.

"Far, far nicer," answered Marjorie, with pathos; "even Louisa would own that: and if any one could deny it, she would."

"She does not love Miss Jorden overmuch, owing to Emily's little narratives of Jelfrey's imagined devotion to her."

"Hush, Neil!" interrupted Marjorie. "You've no business to encroach on our prerogatives. Women may say these things of each other, but we don't give the right to you."

"Then it is a woman's prerogative," asked the colonel, "to make her sister's feelings a subject of laughter with others, in her absence?"

"If Louisa *will* wear her heart on her sleeve," Marjorie said, coolly, as she rose, "it is to be expected from a well-trained daw that he will peck at it."

"However wrong the thing may be, I do not expect you to own to its being so," returned Colonel Stuart, a little sternly.

"No," she answered, "I could not do any thing so silly; I think too well of myself. My sin is self-love, Colonel Stuart, as especially opposed to my father's sin of self-neglect, and Shakspeare says that mine is not so vile as his. So I console myself. Oh, Miss Chester, you would have laughed if you had seen the squire yesterday! This sort of way—look! In his spectacles, with an apron on, sweeping his study himself—study? bah! I call it his cash-box—afraid of letting a servant in, because there were a few shillings lying about; stepping after the broom in this sort of way. I should like Mr. Spendir to have sketched the little scene."

Though none of the others could help listening, and laughing heartily at Marjorie's face and attitude as she mimicked her father with the broom, Colonel Stuart had turned away where he could not see her, no sign of a smile on his face.

"Lina," cried Marjorie, impulsively, when the two girls were upstairs together—"Lina."

And then she kissed her with a long, long earnest kiss. A little understanding the longing and the regret and the self-reproach which called for sympathy in Marjorie's eyes—no trace of mischief lurking in them now—Lina put her arms softly about her, and whispered that she thanked her for calling her by that name.

"I can not call you by any thing else again," Marjorie said, her lips twitching. "Oh, I wish—I wish I could be like you!"

"No, no!" cried Lina, eagerly.

"Like you—just like you; and then this—this miserable anger with myself could never be."

"You said one day that we could not judge of one another's pain," said Lina, softly.

"No, we can' not; but none that you could bear could be just this sort of pain; and—and I hope and trust that you have none," she added, with sudden, regretful tenderness. "There, mine is gone now for to-night."

Marjorie had said good-bye cheerfully, and now sat in the shabby phaeton, wrapped up to the lips in a great red shawl; Colonel Stuart and Sir Neil stood beside her in the dusk of the spring night, the lamp-light from the hall-door just touching them.

"Shall I drive you, Miss Marjorie," the colonel asked, "and send your servant on my horse?"

"I think I feel pretty good now," she answered, with quiet unconcern. "Further lecturing may undo it; so good-night. Drive quickly, James."

But James could not help its being half an hour's drive; and through all that time big tears fell ceaselessly from Marjorie's eyes; fell slowly, too, as only those tears fall that are bravely struggled with in solitary pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

JELFREY'S TACTICS.

Colonel Stuart and his sister were sitting alone after their late dinner. Little Jack was in bed, and Mr. Jelfrey out.

"He must be at Hawkedale," Mrs. Esdaile said. "He would hardly be walking or riding this wet evening. It is always a relief to me, Alick, when he is out."

"Yet you can not tell me why," remarked her brother, smiling.

"No. I can not even tell myself; but I am relieved to be without him. I really dislike him; while I can not understand the reason any more than I can prevent the feeling."

"The only tangible charge you ever bring against him, Adelaide," said the colonel, "is his daring to aspire to—to a close friendship with your friends."

"What right has he to woo a Castillain?" returned Mrs. Esdaile, hotly. "But it is not that only; I want to know how he dare pretend to woo Louisa, when he has set his heart on Marjorie! Marjorie, indeed!"

"Marjorie does not see it, I suppose?"

"See it!" repeated Mrs. Esdaile, laughing in spite of her spleen. "Is there any thing at all like a joke which Marjorie does not see?"

"And you think this very like a joke, eh?" questioned the colonel, his voice lighter than it had been a few minutes before.

"Very, indeed; and would be, even if Marjorie were not a girl of high descent and heir to one hundred thousand pounds—would be, if there were no such thing in the way as a prior engagement to Sir Neil Athelston."

"I wonder when that marriage is to take place? Do you ever hear of it, Adelaide?"

"Not as being fixed for any particular date; but I hear of it often," she answered. "Lady Athelston is fond enough of talking about it. What a day of schemes accomplished and hopes realized it will be for her! won't it, Alick?"

"What were we speaking of before? Oh! Jelfrey. Now, much as you dislike him, Adelaide, you must own he is a gentleman."

"It depends a good deal on one's translation of the word," she said. "I fear, if he is a specimen, you are not of the true metal, Alick. But, still," she added, quickly, "I will own he is what people call gentlemanly. I never saw any one who could make himself more irresistibly agreeable; nor one who could oftener make you agree with him in spite of your better sense and judgment."

"You are going too deep for me, dear," put in the colonel, laughing.

"Nonsense! It's only because you are so determined not to speak against any one. It is so like you, Alick. Well, I'll say no more than this: I wish he were not admitted to be the friend of Neil Athelston. Sir Neil is bad enough, perhaps, by nature; but I know that every hour spent with Eustace Jelfrey makes him a worse man. And I wish the period of his engagement for little Jack were over. I can not bear to break it—I mean I can not bear to ask you to break it."

"No, dear; we engaged him for two years, and it is but just to treat him (in our minds, of course, I mean; there is no fear of your not do-

ing it other ways) as generously as we can for that time. Jack is so continually with you, and so young, that no influence, such as you dread for Sir Neil, could injure him. And Jelfrey is really an excellent teacher, as far as we can judge."

The "excellent teacher," with his head bent, and his hat low over his eyes, was making his way just then along Nether Lane, in the rain and the darkness, walking from the town toward the two cottages which stood half-way to High Athelston. The overbranching trees only extended so far as the lane skirted the park, so that from Churchill to the cottages the road was open to the sky. Jelfrey wished to-night that it had not been so; and yet he cared nothing for the swift, light rain which fell upon him unhindered.

He passed the first cottage, only just glancing at the closed door and shuttered window; then he trod with cautious quietness up the other garden-path, and rapped at the door of Mrs. Cheere's quiet, orderly little house. A tall woman, with a faded face and fierce, sharp eyes, opened it to him only a little way.

"What is it?" she asked, tartly.

Jelfrey pushed back his wet hat. He had a winning smile and a pleasant voice; and the irresistible force of both of these was brought to bear upon Dorcas.

"Will you kindly tell me if Mr. Spendir lives here?"

"Lives here! No, thank God, he does *not!*" And the door was shut abruptly in Mr. Jelfrey's face.

The sharp retort and sudden repulse took his breath away; but he was not one to be nonplused for many minutes at a time. Dorcas had hardly settled herself to her work again, when he summoned her with another rap; and, without waiting to see whether she would answer it or not, he softly opened the door, and entered the room with his hat in his hand.

"If you will allow me, I shall be very glad to shelter here for a few minutes," he said, courteously. "It is raining heavily, and I have no umbrella. Will you allow me?"

"The rain off your hat's falling all about the carpet. Give it to me to take into the kitchen," remarked Dorcas, shortly.

He gave it, with a bland apology for troubling her, and then sat down with the utmost ease in the prim parlor.

"There's no objection to your sheltering," said Dorcas, looking rather favorably upon him when she returned, but still evidently resenting some injury which she felt rankling; "but I thought you said you wanted that man next door. Shame it is, too, that he *should* be next door."

"Oh no, I do not want him," smiled Jelfrey, pleasantly; "I only needed shelter; and, as I happened to know his name, I thought it better to ask him instead of troubling you."

"Never mind the trouble," muttered Dorcas, gruffly. "I suppose," she continued with intense acrimony, "he could have given you shelter, but I don't suppose there's any thing else he could have given you."

"Poor, I understand," put in Jelfrey, in a tone of encouragement.

"Poor! Ugh, I've seen poor folks often enough to know them by sight, but that's not his disease. He's a born miser. And, I can tell you, a half-mad miser, forever singing and making noises with fiddles and things; and laughing and knocking about, is not just the right sort of neighbor for a quiet, orderly woman."

"Indeed he is not," assented Jelfrey, readily, suppressing the smile which Dorcas's description warranted. "He must indeed be, as you say, half mad. I'm sorry for his child."

"Sorry for him?" echoed Dorcas, shrilly; "he's not the one to be sorry for. It's more natural to be sorry for those he worrits and torments to death."

"I almost wonder that Sir Neil Athelston let Colonel Stuart have the cottage for them," said Jelfrey, with intense sympathy; "he might have thought how unpleasant it would be for you."

"He might have thought — yes," returned Dorcas, icily, "but he did not. People like him don't think much. Thinking for others doesn't generally go with money."

Jelfrey bent his face a little. His smile was irrepressible, but he would not let her see it.

"But your neighbor, on the contrary, has no money, and he does not seem to think for others either."

"Thinking for others doesn't generally go with miserliness," retorted Dorcas, stiffly.

A thought of Marjorie Castillain flashed into Jelfrey's mind—of Marjorie and of some others who were kind to this isolated woman—and an ironical thought followed, classing all gratitude with this gratitude. But no words escaped him but words of interest and sympathy. So he led her on gradually to tell him all she could of the life which those two passed in the next cottage. Hungrily he listened to all she said, but so easily that he only seemed to be enjoying her company, not what she told him. And Dorcas felt the charm of his presence, as others had felt it often and often during the years of his manhood.

"And I've known *ladies* come to the cottage, too," she concluded, with a relish, "and one came in the dark, and listened outside his door."

"Perhaps too bashful to go in and get her portrait taken for a few shillings," said Jelfrey, with a charitable smile, and a well-concealed eagerness in his voice.

Dorcas sniffed in cool disdain.

"I was trying to drop asleep," she said, resenting even the retrospect, "but it was as good not try as try, with that fearful noise just through these thin walls; more like bagpipes than any thing else, only worse. So I got up to look out of my room window. Then I saw her, though I dare say she thought herself hidden in the dark. There was a bit of light from his window, and I saw her."

"Young, I suppose?" asked the tutor, pleasantly.

But Dorcas was hazy on this point, and did not choose to show that she was, so she passed the question by with lofty unconcern.

"If I'd been down here," she resumed, "and if she'd gone into his house, which I don't think she'd the honesty to do, I should have known what she wanted. The wall in that cupboard's thin enough for that, thin enough to give me the earache pretty often."

Under Jelfrey's white hand there lay a heap of periodicals on the little round-table. His eyes seemed to be tracing the letters on the thin paper covers; but no words printed there could

have brought into them that sudden flash of satisfaction.

"I hope the thin walls do not belong to your usual sitting-room?" he inquired, with anxious sympathy.

"Usual sitting-room or unusual sitting-room," retorted Dorcas, "the walls are thin; and that's enough to have turned me out of this house years ago, if I hadn't been determined to bear it."

If Jelfrey's thoughts had not been too much engrossed by other things, he might have fancied Dorcas rather at a loss to explain her reason for not being turned out by the thin walls.

"That is the closet, I fear," he said, pointing to a door opposite him.

"Yes, that's it," replied Dorcas, with resignation; "and inside that closet I could hear, if I liked, every word of the nonsense those two talk."

"If you had not told me this yourself," said Jelfrey, with great tact, "I should never have been able to believe it. Have you really never spoken to Sir Neil about it?"

"It is not often that Sir Neil Athelston troubles me with opportunities of speaking to him about any thing," she answered, viciously.

"I should like to mention it to him, if you would allow me," said Jelfrey, rising. "I do not ask you to show me the place, but—"

"Oh, you can see it," said Mrs. Cheere, a little mollified by his evident sympathy. "There's nothing secret in any of my cupboards."

With the door shut the closet would have been in darkness, but she did not of course offer to shut it upon her visitor. He stood within for a few minutes, his head against the wall; then he stepped lightly into the room again, and the lips that had been pressed together for that little time with cunning cruelty were smiling now.

"I think that no landlord should suffer such walls as those to stand," he said, shaking his head sympathetically; "and if you will give me permission, I will remind Sir Neil of it. But I would not he should think you have been complaining; so I will mention it casually, as if I had accidentally heard of or discovered it. You had better not speak of this visit at all—neither will I—to any one. Miss Marjorie Castillain is fond of coming to see you, I know," he added, suavely. "Does she know how the sounds disturb you?"

"I've told her, but she's harum-scarum; and I don't believe she heeds it."

"She is young and giddy, true; and would have forgotten it, I dare say."

A generous excuse, truly, from his lips!

"And Miss Marjorie sometimes comes to see your next-door neighbor?" he went on, with apparent indifference.

"Yes, sometimes; and *she* don't want her portrait, I know."

"Comes as a friend," murmured Jelfrey, with a hot rush of color in his face, though his cool and easy kindliness did not forsake him. "You have a handsome book here," he went on, turning over the leaves of the paper-covered books on the round-table. 'History of England,' I see, in monthly parts, and illustrated. How very nice!"

"Yes, it's a handsome book," rejoined Dorcas, with stately pride, "and interesting. It's a handsome price, too—two shillings a month! I began to take it in when my little girl was a baby, and stopped when—she was lost; so I haven't got the end. I don't care about the end; unless she ever comes and wants it."

"Very nice—very nice," muttered Jelfrey, turning the pages over and over, and wondering how Dorcas had found its interest when none of the leaves were cut; wondering whether any one could be found who would wade through all that close small print and dry matter; and wondering, too, whether the motive for issuing such an endless periodical must not have been to insure the author a life-annuity. "Of course, you never lend such a book as this?" he suggested; "else—"

"Lend it! No, indeed!" cried Dorcas.

"But may I ask you," returned Jelfrey, going to the point at once, "to let me sometimes just drop in and look over a few pages? I will be very careful of the work—a handsome and valuable work, indeed—and be very much obliged to you for the privilege."

"Not to take it from this table," explained Dorcas.

"No, I will not; and it will never be but for a few minutes at a time."

"Oh! you're welcome to that," she said, relaxing a little of her normal rigidity; "but you'll take the chance of finding me engaged in the kitchen."

Jelfrey's eyes brightened suddenly, and his words of acknowledgment were airy in their gladness.

"Will you promise," he entreated, "never to let my coming disturb you at all? Just treat me, when I come, as if I were a piece of furniture, or as if I were not here at all. I shall be so glad if you will promise this."

Dorcas promised, gruffly enough. And then the tutor suddenly found that the rain had abated sufficiently for him to venture forth. He gave her a friendly hand-shake and further thanks; then went out again into the night and the rain and the darkness.

And as he walked back very rapidly toward Churchill, he laughed once or twice to himself, wet as he was, thinking how dexterously he had prepared for the work that lay before him—the crafty, cruel work which his hand and heart were skilled to do and to design.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOUNTAIN TARN.

MAY, June, July—the summer months have come and gone. A few hours more, and August, too, will have smiled her parting smile, and hidden her blooming, beautiful face. But in the light and warmth of this golden smile of hers there are enjoyment and festivity among the Highshire hills. Her last glance has to fall upon merry faces lingering among the flowers in the valley; and the music of her soft farewell—whispered among the leaves—is to mingle with the clear and jubilant young voices on the hill-side. But, before we join them there, in the beauty of the August afternoon, let us look back a little, and see how these summer months have sped.

Lady Athelston has grown fond of her companion now; yet in such thralldom is she still to

her maid Fletcher that she hides this fondness carefully, even from the girl herself. Always obliged to lean upon some one, Lady Athelston finds it pleasantest to lean upon Miss Chester, who is always so calm, so wise, so gentle; always knows exactly the right thing to do, and never makes a fuss about doing it.

Lady Athelston dislikes a fuss: if there be one thing capable of rousing in her mind a feeling vigorous enough to be called hate, then Lady Athelston hates a fuss. Fletcher, getting often now excited in her jealousy of Miss Chester, forgets this, and fusses in her duties; therefore, day by day, is Fletcher undermining her own influence; while Lina—always patient, always self-forgetful, always alive to Lady Athelston's wants and wishes, and always a true lady—is, day by day, as surely increasing and intensifying hers.

Lina thinks nothing of this. Just as she is perfectly unconscious how her earnest thoughtfulness and simple woman's wisdom supply all the deficiencies of the lady she calls her mistress (and the while hides that they do so), so she is unconscious with what true bravery and humility she walks that solitary path which she has chosen. She only knows that she is trying to do all she has undertaken to do, leaning on other strength than her own; and that the task is a strangely heavy one, in spite of all.

At first she thought she knew the only reason of this heaviness, and that it would vanish—at any rate, for a time—when she and Lady Athelston were alone. So she looked forward to the time when Sir Neil would be in London. But when he went, the load, though lessened, was not taken from her; and she knew then that this pressing, overwhelming shadow of great, indefinable fear could never leave her, either while she lived in Sir Neil Athelston's house, or while the artist remained in that cottage near. Yet now that she knew he did so, her one strong reason for remaining was stronger tenfold than it had ever been.

Sir Neil Athelston had not staid long in London. In the very height of the season, from the very heart of its attractions, he had returned to High Athelston, vouchsafing only the rather novel explanation that he had been "bored to death." His mother did not often trouble herself now to spend a season in London, and she rejoiced, with an utterly childish delight, to think that he had found the great house in town too dreary without her.

"Foolish boy," she said complacently to Lina. "He really had no other reason for coming back, but that his old mother was here, and not there."

And Lina, whose eyes had been proud and hot and angry ever since she and Lady Athelston had left the dining-room, where Sir Neil had whispered another reason to her even in his deaf mother's presence, was grateful that the words were not put as a question.

This was in May, and now she looked on to the time when she and Lady Athelston were to go to the sea-side together. In July they went, but at the last moment Sir Neil changed all his plans, and took them.

"Fickle and uncertain as ever," his mother said, with a smile of pride and pleasure.

To Lina this sea-side life was worse than the life at High Athelston. Here Sir Neil seemed to be able to take entire possession of her the greater part of every day. There were ladies there who knew him, and welcomed him among them; yet he was always disengaged to walk with Lina, and could always manage that his mother should think him the same dutiful son, yet should not be able to interfere, in any way, with his selfish pleasures. There were gentlemen there who sought him, evidently accustomed to his prompt participation in any amusement which might be the fancy of the hour; yet he was always at liberty to ride, or drive, or sail with Lina, and no refusal or rebuff of hers daunted him, or stayed him. And what the world said, or what it thought, had as little weight with him as had the whisperings of a conscience which could not quite forget that there was such a name in the wide world as Marjorie Castillain.

"What's the use of caring what's said about you?" laughed Neil, rather enjoying the banter of the young men with whom he was playing billiards. "You may fret yourself to a shadow in no time, if you care what the world says. I never did, and never shall."

"Evidently," one of his companions answered, coolly; "but I should not like to be talked about quite as you are, Athelston."

"Oh, it's no more painful when you're used to it than skinning is to an eel. What does the mighty world say now?"

"Much," laughed a young man, looking up slowly from the cue he was chalking. "It says Sir Neil Athelston is paying his mother's companion a ridiculous amount of attention, just to spite Lady Helen Burton, who (it knows, of course, why shouldn't it?) has come from Highshire on purpose to breathe his atmosphere here. And it says that she is very absurd to be provoked by him, because he is an engaged man, and therefore an ineligible member of society. And it says that Lady Athelston ought to put a stop to such things. And it says that Miss Chester, of course, will break her heart when her mistress's son turns his fancy elsewhere. And it says that she must be a designing little hypocrite. Thus the mighty world."

"And it never says," cried a very young man, joining in the conversation, radiant after a fluke, "that, if she's not the most beautiful girl here, there's no other more beautiful. No; catch it saying that!"

"Nor does it say another thing," added the first speaker, coldly, "that if Miss Castillain, of Hawkedale, had a brother, Sir Neil Athelston's behavior here would be a little less unguarded, and Miss Chester's fair fame unbreathed upon by the idle, scandal-loving tongues which make this world you talk of."

"I say," interposed Neil, looking fully and angrily into his companion's face, while the quick color dyed his own, "don't you know where to stop?"

"It would not signify so much," was the deliberate answer, "if the young lady did not live under your own roof, and under your own protection, as it were. Why, man, can't you see the wrong you do to her, as well as to Miss Castillain?"

But Neil, irresistibly tickled by the seriousness so out of place in that gay scene, only joined the others in a hearty laugh.

"Nothing goes deep enough even to put him out of temper," muttered the gentleman who had

spoken last, as he took his place at the table, "and nothing ever will."

So the world said what it chose, and Sir Neil, unmoved, went on his selfish way. There was another relief to which Lina could look forward after their return to High Athelston, and this was Sir Neil's visit, in the grouse season, to his shooting-box in Scotland. This came and went; a few days of rest and quiet, and then he was back again, and the house was filled with the old gayety and cruelty and unrest.

To another rest Lina was looking forward now. This was the expectation of a houseful of visitors for September. They were most of them to arrive on the evening of the last day of August, to meet at an eight-o'clock dinner; and before this dinner, Sir Neil Athelston had determined to have a few hours of—for him—very novel enjoyment. "Rustic felicity," as he called it, with his ironical, good-humored laugh. "All drinking tea in the valley, you know, Miss Chester, like a Sunday-school; and a real kettle and fire to improve the drama, like the Crummles's pump and tubs. What do you say to my highly original idea?"

Lina said nothing but that original ideas were always to be welcomed. But even Neil could see how little pleasure the thought gave her when he proposed it, and how her light words and fleeting smile only covered a thorough and entire indifference. When Lady Athelston had arranged, however, that the guests from their own neighborhood, who were to stay at High Athelston with those from a distance, should be asked to join in this tea at the water-fall, and drive home with them in time for dinner, Lina looked forward with more pleasure to the afternoon. Marjorie Castillain would be among them; and these few months had taught Lina how to value this girl's generous, willful friendship. True, Louisa would be there as well as her sister—and Louisa had by no means taught Miss Chester to value *her* friendship; on the contrary, she had taught her simply to dread and avoid all intercourse with her; but Lina lost sight of that in the pleasure of the other anticipation.

Then, Colonel Stuart would come too; and, even if Mr. Jelfrey were invited with him (as he probably would be, because Sir Neil liked him; and because, as he was known in the neighborhood to be a gentleman by birth, and a clever and attractive one, it pretty generally chanced that he was invited everywhere), it was never the same pain to Lina to meet him when the colonel was present.

So they all met, gayly and pleasantly, just within the valley gate; and, descending from the carriages which had brought them, prepared to walk up to the water-fall, following the winding of the glistening little stream which curved and frolicked hither and thither on the soft, bright turf; all walking, at least, except Lady Athelston, and Lina, who drove the pony-carriage on through the valley.

Slowly they went along in the August sunshine, the walking party now and then keeping up with them, now and then falling behind, and now and then hastening laughingly on. "As merry a party," Lina thought, looking on from her low cushioned seat, "as ever the great, sunny hills looked down upon." And as she caught glimpses of the different faces, her thoughts went back—as thoughts have a habit of doing occasionally—to the first time she had seen them; and she wondered how far her first impressions had proved true ones. "Nearly in every case," she said to herself.

The knowledge of them which this summer had given her had hardly changed her opinion in the slightest degree, where she had been able to form an opinion at all. Had not Miss Castillain always shown just the same cold suspicion and hard mistrust of her as she had read in her greeting on that first day? And had not Marjorie been always just as friendly, as amusing, and as incomprehensible as she had been during that unexpected call which she had made on the girl who came a stranger among them? Mr. Castillain, eccentric and narrow-minded as he was, had always been jocundly patronizing to Lina, just as he had been on their first introduction.

Then Colonel Stuart, was he not always courteous, and kind, and helpful? From him, Lina's eyes wandered to Eustace Jelfrey, and a shadow clouded them. Why was the power placed in his hands making her life miserable?—yet why was it so hard to tell how he did it? Every word he uttered to her—sarcastic and supercilious to her ear, polite and kind to the ears of others—made her heart beat with pain and anger; yet, unless he lied to her, he was thinking always of her happiness and welfare, and using his great influence with Sir Neil Athelston, to persuade him to desist in those eager, ceaseless attentions, which were an insult offered now from him to his mother's companion.

This, Mr. Jelfrey made her believe when he was in her presence, though strong within her all the time was the consciousness that she never disliked Sir Neil so thoroughly as when he was acting under the tutor's influence, and that Lady Athelston was never so hard and selfish as when she, too, had been in his society—no, not even Louisa Castillain could make her quite so unfeeling and so exacting.

"Yes, nearly in every case my first impressions have proved true ones," Lina said to herself, glancing with unconscious wistfulness into her companion's face, as if that were the exception only. "I think, though, that I never did have any definite impression there," she thought; "the mother and the son were too much alike for me to care. Are such natures capable of any thing beyond self-indulgence and self-love, I wonder?"

"What a handsome couple Sir Neil and Marjorie make!" spoke Lady Athelston, suddenly breaking in upon this thought; and Lina nodded with her bright, assenting smile. She was always ready, eagerly ready, to class those two together.

"Not that Marjorie is quite to be compared with my son in point of good looks," continued Lady Athelston, with slow unctuousness; "but, then, there are other things about her which compensate for want of real beauty. Ah! Mr. Jelfrey, have they let you off to join the old lady? Miss Chester and I were just remarking how admirably my son and Miss Castillain suit each other; and how, though she has no real beauty, she has other things which compensate. For instance, her figure; now what figure do you gentlemen pronounce her to be?"

Marjorie, a hundred yards in front, was crossing the sunny little stream on the stepping-stones.

Neil, on the other side, waited for her, his offered hand unheeded, his dissatisfied eyes fixed upon the carriage behind. Watching them intently, Jelfrey answered, with a smile,

"Exquisite! There can be but one voice among us on that point, Lady Athelston."

"Though Louisa's face is so much more regular, I think Marjorie carries away the palm. She always makes a greater sensation in society, as you may say; doesn't she, Miss Chester?" inquired Lady Athelston, always requiring her own opinions indorsed, and eager for praise of Marjorie, because she was to be Neil's wife. "I must not ask you, I suppose, Mr. Jelfrey. It would not be fair to tempt you to say that Marjorie has the more winning face."

Eustace Jelfrey's lips curled with a sudden involuntary scorn; his eyes for a moment flashed with savage jealousy; then he said, coolly, with a smile which was bestowed on Lina as well as on Lady Athelston,

"Miss Castillain's face is classically handsome; Miss Marjorie's greatest admirer could not say so of hers."

And Lina, listening to the sarcastic words, turned her eyes from the false, handsome face with a feeling of real fear.

"Pull up, Miss Chester," cried Sir Neil, standing near the water-fall, and motioning the groom to the ponies' heads as they came up to him, "this is the place."

"'This is the place, stand still, my steed,'" quoted Marjorie, sauntering round to Lina's side of the phaeton. "Did you ever see two of the gold-fish at High Athelston walking about the croquet-ground, Miss Chester, trying to arrange the hoops?"

"Not yet," laughed Lina.

"I feared not; but, at any rate, I can show you a very similar sight up above; namely, the twin canaries arranging tea *al fresco*, and overwhelmed by the responsibility of a disjointed fire and an uncertain kettle. Neil is going to help them when he has landed his mother; and while they exercise their united skill, let us walk a little."

Neil came up to them eagerly.

"You are almost a stranger among the hills, Miss Chester," he said; "so come and let me show you the chief points of interest before tea."

"Then *I* must go and help Colonel Stuart and Mr. Jorden," said Marjorie, coolly.

"That's a hit, eh, Marjorie?" laughed Neil, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder. "I must take the hint conveyed in it. Well, go where you will, and I'll do what I've got to do here; but tell me where I shall find you presently."

"We will go over the hills there beyond the fall," said Marjorie, "and come back by the pool."

"All right," rejoined Sir Neil; "don't join any other party."

"I almost believe," remarked Marjorie, as the two girls strolled on, "that this is going to be quite a jolly little picnic. And it is not very often, is it, Lina, that those things which are purposely arranged to give pleasure do give it? It seems to me that you have only just to anticipate a thing for it to turn out a disappointing, lowering, depressing failure. Is that your experience too?"

"I don't often look forward to any great enjoyment," returned Lina; "I have not for many years."

One swift glance, tender and pitiful, Marjorie gave into the beautiful white face beside her, then laughed.

"Did not Sir Neil look handsome and angry when I sent him off? I wonder whether he is going to enjoy his picnic."

"I think we all intend to do so," Lina answered, smiling. "I hope you do not prognosticate disappointment for us all, Miss Castillain."

"Make haste," interrupted Marjorie, lowering her voice; "I am afraid of—Mr. Jelfrey joining us."

"It is Colonel Stuart's step behind us," corrected Lina; "but he is only going to help Miss Jorden up the steep."

"Oh," replied Marjorie, with a laugh that stifled a quick breath of relief, and yet with a deepening of odd shadows in her eyes, "if it is Colonel Stuart, we need not fear. He will not care to worry us, nor worry to himself by overtaking us. Make haste!"

So, quickly and happily they went on, climbing past the fall, and on up the steep hill-side. Then they turned to make their way down into the valley again, past the tarn that lay so still and white below the slope.

"It looks like a harmless and rather picturesque little mountain lake, doesn't it?" asked Miss Castillain, as they neared it; "but you have no idea, Lina, of its horrible treachery. It was originally the shaft of a mine—I can not tell whether an exhausted one or a failure, for it certainly was never worked within my memory—but gradually the water filled it, and then spread, till now, all round, it touches the sloping banks quite gently, doesn't it, as if it had no horrible unsounded depth in its centre? I don't like the place; I never did, though I seldom say so, because the idea would only be called a stupid fancy. But, Lina, I have such a shuddering dislike for any thing that is—oh! I hardly know what I mean—any thing that is trustworthy only on the surface; that isn't what it seems to be. Do you understand?"

She looked round into her companion's face as she spoke, and seeing it, there came upon her a great regret for those words, which had been uttered without a thought beyond their present meaning, yet had the power to pierce so keenly.

"Yes," she resumed, not apparently having noticed any thing of this, "a place, I mean, in which life may be lost while you never suspect it possible—precipices, and lakes, and glaciers, and that sort of thing," added Marjorie, at random. "But this water does look its character a little, doesn't it?"

"It is a solitary and gloomy place, even on this summer's day," said Lina, as they stood on the brink, and looked far down into the water; "gloomy even with the sunbeams on its surface, and the flowers growing to its very edge. Then, what must it be in the winter-time? Think of it in the haunted dusk of a December afternoon!"

"Or November. November is the month I hate. Oh, I would not be here in the gloomy dusk of a November day," said Marjorie, with a laughing shudder, "for a thousand pounds. Would you?"

"For a thousand pounds," echoed Lina, with a strange tone of pain in her low voice, "indeed—indeed I would."

"Mercenary," laughed Marjorie, "what a good thing! That is one of the Castillain virtues, and I feared you did not possess it. When they tell me of Mr. Spendir's miserliness, you don't know how I feel drawn to him. Ah, talk of an angel, and you hear the flutter of wings. There is Mr. Spendir, I believe; sketching, is he? Oh, what an object!"

Lina's eyes followed Miss Castillain's rapidly and eagerly, and saw the artist—his head enveloped in a large yellow silk handkerchief — bent busily over his work.

"Come," said Marjorie, noticing nothing of Lina's quickened breath, "and see what he is doing."

Fitz Spendir looked up slowly from his sketching-board as the girls advanced; then rose, his handsome, sunburned face looking out from the yellow handkerchief.

"Why do you wear it, Mr. Spendir?" asked Marjorie, looking at it with intense inquisitiveness in her big, grave eyes.

"I wear it to keep off the flies," said Fitz, coloring a little through the bronze skin, but with no vestige of shamefacedness. "Being yellow, Miss Castillain, it does not interfere with the colors if it slips over my eyes. An odd feature in the landscape, am I not?"

"About the only earnest or employed figure among us all," said Marjorie, with a gentleness for which Lina thanked her in her heart; "so you ought to make an odd feature in the landscape. Please go on sketching, Mr. Spendir, while we stay here on the moss. Isn't it beautiful? The tiny white butterflies skimming over the heather might be snow-flakes, mightn't they, Lina? I shall never have courage to go back, for it seems as if my tread would crush a hundred."

"The instinct of self-preservation is too strong within them," said Lina, laughing a little nervously as she stood.

"An instinct common to us all," put in Fitz, quietly, as he went on with his work. "I wish the instinct included preservation of other things besides life."

Lina was looking down upon him, a long, sad questioning in her eyes.

"It does," she said; "only we are rash and—and forgetful, and do not follow it."

Something in the tone made Marjorie silent for a few minutes, wondering. As she stood so, looking, not down upon the sketch below her, but away among the shadows of the firs which stood above the tarn, a group from the valley below came up the little path among the fern and heather, only turning aside to the pool when they suddenly caught sight of the girls and the artist beside it.

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried Emily Jorden, clinging to her with a pretty little affectation of fear, "why did you come here? We never come here when we picnic; it is so very dreadfully gloomy!"

"Awfully gloomy!" assented Marjorie, with eyes so bright and laughing that Lina doubted whether she could really have uttered those words about the lake only a few minutes before. "I should feel quite frightened, only that Mr. Jelfrey looks so brave, and Sir Neil is so big, and Mr. Spendir is sure to be accustomed to mountain horrors, and Colonel Stuart has been in battle, and Mr. Jorden is, by his cloth, made impervious. So," continued Marjorie, "I don't feel so greatly alarmed as I might under other circumstances."

"But don't you really think it dismal?" asked Emily, raising her eyes innocently, with that peculiar glance which is intended for one person and directed to another.

"I remember," said Marjorie, particularly addressing the artist as they all stood together beside the pool—"I remember well a silent little lake in the Scilly Islands, which the sight of still and shadowy water always recalls to me, and which was something to make one tremble, indeed. We had to make our way to it on our hands and knees, as it were, along a cavern that seemed endless. Then we came upon it—a high, vaulted space, occupied by a dark, still sheet of water. The guide stuck candles all around us on the slimy walls; and can you judge of the effect of these, and of those we carried, when we embarked upon it, rowing on until it was too narrow for us to pass? The reflection in the jetty-black water, and the awful, silent gloom of the place, made my hair really rise, I believe, as it rises in novels. The whole scene — the motionless water, dark as death, the weird lights, the slowly moving boat, could be like nothing but the entrance to Hades. Very few people go to the Scilly Isles," added Marjorie, as if glad to dismiss the recollection, "else I would ask you if you knew the spot, Mr. Spendir."

The sunshine sparkled on the water before him; the birds flew twittering from the firs opposite; the dainty little white butterflies chased each other in and out of the shelter of the heather; but the artist's eyes saw nothing of this. They were dark and sad, with a far-seeing, inward look; and over them the low straight brows were drawn with pain.

"Miss Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, answering quietly, as over his face there passed the sudden awakening of a great pity, "my remembrance of the islands has a brighter aspect than that. I can only recall the lake in the gardens of the abbey at Trescoe, with the islands in its centre —islands within islands — where tropical birds and flowers abound; where emus walk sedately under hedges of scarlet geranium fifteen feet high, and among rare ice-plants of more than one hundred different hues and forms."

Colonel Stuart—who had evidently been talking on for some purpose—stopped here, with a sudden movement, to help Lina Chester, for she had turned quickly away and begun to descend the path again.

"Lady Athelston will want me, I think, perhaps," she faltered, her lips twitching, and her eyes wide and miserable.

"We are all coming, Miss Chester," put in Sir Neil's high-bred, authoritative tones. "Wait one instant, please; I want Mr. Spendir to join us at tea. It's a practical joke of a meal," he went on, laughing. "Come, Spendir, we shall all be glad."

Sir Neil Athelston could be courteous enough when he chose, and he was courteous then. But the artist quietly refused. They were all urging him when Eustace Jelfrey and Miss Castillain came up to the pool beside them, standing nearer to it than had any of them.

"That's right," said Neil, waiting at Lina Chester's side; "Miss Jorden seemed to think there was something about the water which should make people avoid it."

"Haunted?" laughed Jelfrey.

With a sudden movement—half of terror, half of disgust—Lina started back; for, just as his shadow touched the water, a heavier one spread from edge to edge; and for a moment the sun's rays were swallowed, and the pool was black and treacherous as night. Only a minute, and the sun shone out again beyond the passing cloud; but the old look never came again to Lina's face through all that evening.

There was much laughter during tea, for it takes but little to provoke laughter over such a meal among the hills; with a great fire burning up against the ardent August sky, and requiring constant replenishing; and half a dozen gentlemen waiting, with a gay attempt at professional skill, and making the task as comical a one as possible. Every joke passes muster then, and laughter is bright and quick and ready to wait even upon a trifling jest, which would be scornfully ignored as too poor to provoke a smile in the very same society at home. But when the noisy meal was over, and the twin canaries—who had had nothing to do—were preparing to enjoy a quiet tea together in the background, the party separated; and then more than one of them wished that they could have gone straight from the cheerful meal away from the hills altogether.

"How beautiful it is!" Louisa Castillain said, looking up to where the sunshine lingered on the hill-tops, while the valley lay in shadow. But she was left to saunter with Lady Athelston only, and soon the beauty died out for her.

"Lovely!" murmured Emily Jorden, glancing coyly down into the chattering little stream which threaded its way through the moss, and touching with her parasol the glistening pebbles or shining leaves which lay below the rippling surface. But Colonel Stuart listened gravely to her rhapsody, and on the narrow pathway above (so far away that the sheep upon it looked like toys) Eustace Jelfrey and Marjorie Castillain were walking idly together. So very soon the loveliness died out for her.

Could it have died out more completely even if her ears had detected the passionate, jealous, hopeless love which Eustace Jelfrey tried in vain to hide as he talked to this girl?—a love that was cowardly in its despair, and threatening in its selfishness; a love which he strove to make her feel in every word and look of his, yet which he felt it would be ruin to him to confess.

And Marjorie walked beside him with utter, cold indifference, too proud to attempt an escape, and too fond of fun not to glean a certain amusement even from this *tête-à-tête*.

They had stopped for a minute on the height, and were looking round before they began their descent, when Jelfrey made a plunge over which he had hesitated for weeks. Inherent coward he must have been with all his daring, for his lips shook as he slowly uttered the words which he had rehearsed so many times, and on which he had built his last and most desperate hopes.

"I am glad to see Lady Athelston enjoy herself as she has done to-day, Miss Castillain," he said. "Though I know Miss Chester's behavior has worried her, she seems to be growing fond of her young companion. It certainly is not at all honorable in the girl to repay this undeserved kindness with treachery."

"Not at all," said Marjorie, placidly.

"For this whole afternoon, and for many days before," continued Jelfrey, his voice a little quicker and more eager, and his eyes turning from the distance with a keen, intent look at her as he spoke, "I have marked it with pain and regret. Lady Athelston's companion is using every art and every wile she possesses to win the love of Lady Athelston's son. Is that just, is that honorable, for one who is living, as it were, on her bounty?"

"Not at all," returned Marjorie again.

"But perhaps the most harassing thought of all, to poor Lady Athelston," continued Jelfrey, making his desperate last throw, "is that Sir Neil encourages this—nay, more, tempts her on. In fact, he—he seems to enjoy being caught in the meshes of an attachment which has an extraordinary and incomprehensible attraction for him, such as"—the die should be cast now; he would not draw back from his last throw—"no other attachment ever could have had. Is this a state of affairs which Lady Athelston can possibly sit down and calmly contemplate?"

"I don't know," said Marjorie, looking full into his face with her bright, honest eyes; "but Lady Athelston has a marvelous power of sitting down and calmly contemplating affairs."

"Not such as those," rejoined Jelfrey, his face hot and scarlet now; "not the perfidy of the girl whom she has taken into her house in charity, or the faithlessness of her own son; above all, not the treachery practiced toward—another."

"I see," said Marjorie, in her clear, slow voice. "I see what you are endeavoring to make me see; and more, perhaps. It is very gratifying to me, Mr. Jelfrey, to be made aware of what you think," she went on, calmly, as she began the descent of the hill. "It will at least enlighten me as to your motives, if I am puzzled by your conduct in the future, as I have been a little puzzled by it now and then in the past. Of course you are kind to have confided in me; and you have been kind in your frequent warnings to Lady Athelston to beware of the girl whom she did *not* take into her house in charity—there has been no question of charity in the matter. And of course you are kind to Sir Neil in putting him on his guard against that solitary man who is working among the hills here for a scanty livelihood. Oh, pray guard Sir Neil against him, because you choose to hate him, and most of all, perhaps, because I choose to like him. We are surrounded by traitors," added the girl, changing her tone to one of easy sarcasm, "and if we steer safely among them we shall owe it all to you. Accept my thanks, at least, Mr. Jelfrey; for if there *is* one thing in the world more despicable to me than all other bad things put together, it is—treachery."

Jelfrey's cheeks burned hotly. The tone was so very unmistakable (though the sarcasm was uttered with lady-like quietness), that he failed entirely in his answer. Yet when Emily Jorden met them—though she made room immediately for him at her side, and smiled her pleased welcome—he quitted Marjorie with real unwillingness; angry with himself though, as he always was, for being so enthralled by the only girl who had ever carelessly and openly despised his devotion.

There was no contempt of his devotion in

Emily Jorden's manner as they walked together down the valley, and the devotion was apparently quite genuine. But at the valley gate, where the horses were being put to the carriages again, and the scattered party gathering, Eustace left her and joined Sir Neil, who had dawdled a little apart, with a rather ominous gloom on his fair, handsome face.

"How dismal Miss Chester looks!" began Jelfrey, with his usual tact, and in a low, interested, yet idle tone. "She looks as if she had been vexing some one she is fond of. That would be Miss Marjorie Castillain, I fear, for I can not be sure of Miss Chester loving any one else who is here to-day. Miss Castillain is so very hasty, that I can readily fancy her hurting the feelings of a timid, shy girl like Miss Chester."

"Miss Castillain has had nothing to do with it," returned Sir Neil, promptly, a light of sudden hope, of which he was unconscious, flashing in his long blue eyes; "it was I who bothered her. And why the deuce don't you speak out, man?—why are you smiling?"

"At your word 'bothered,' I can pretty well see what has vexed Miss Chester; not your bothering, but the feeling of having parted from you in a pet—of course you did part in a pet, Sir Neil?" he added, with his questioning smile.

And Sir Neil, hot and angry, and glad to find a vent for his impatience, told of Lina's cold manner to himself, and then of a certain quiet rebuke which had rankled within him most of all.

At this Jelfrey laughed, so lightly and so skeptically, that Sir Neil Athelston felt his spirits rise again; and he listened to the tutor's specious arguments with an eager gladness shining again under the heavy lashes of his sleepy eyes.

But there was one thing Jelfrey had yet to say, and it must be said now. He could not beat about the bush, as he had tried to do with Marjorie. He must just say what he had to say, and leave the words to take root as they would. So, acting upon this determination, Jelfrey drew the bow suddenly and sharply, and the arrow, poisoned and double-pointed, sped surely on its way, keen and direct.

"You are sure of these things?" questioned Sir Neil, in Jelfrey's first pause; and his lips were tight and merciless. "You swear to them?"

"I should swear to them," rejoined the tutor, calmly, "if I were such a one as the fellow of whom I have been speaking. But, being allowed to be your friend, Sir Neil, and Miss Castillain's friend, I merely need to tell you of the fact."

"The scamp!" muttered the baronet. "And you overheard Miss Chester tell him she would go to his cottage the first evening she had liberty?"

"I overheard it; yes."

"And you say Marjorie goes?"

"I know it."

"Great heavens! a vagabond, wandering painter fellow! And you say there is some—confound it all! what were your words?—connection between—between—"

"Leave the thought now, Sir Neil," put in Jelfrey, with gentle composure, "and leave all the planning to me. I will forge the weapons ready to your hands, if you will only take care to use them skillfully when I give them up. I am sorry in my heart that Miss Castillain should act unworthily; but I certainly do not think Miss Chester has done so. I think this man has some power, perhaps, over her, from which your brave and generous hands may rescue her, to win her whole heart's gratitude and love. Your watchword is but to watch and wait; mine is to dare and do."

"I shall drive my mother now," said Sir Neil, with a great lightening of his cloudy face; "I was too much enraged to do so before. By Jove! Jelfrey, though you half maddened me, you seem to have given me a capital notion; and, upon my honor, I'm obliged to you, though I can't exactly tell what the notion is. Marjorie," he went on, his voice a little stiff and proud to her as he came up to the phaeton where his mother sat, "how are you going?"

"If you drive your mother, I shall sit behind you with Miss Chester," returned Marjorie, promptly, perhaps noting his displeasure, for a slow flush rose in her face as Colonel Stuart assisted her to her seat. "Of course I had an original design of driving in our own carriage," she added, as she arranged the soft white rug about her, "but, like most of my designs, it was frustrated. Louisa proclaimed her determination to drive herself, on condition Mr. Jelfrey would assist her—the poor old pony *may* be restive—and so I found myself in the wrong box. You needn't look scared at that, Colonel Stuart; it isn't slang. You ought to know it's a quotation from 'Foxe's Martyrs,' quite a Sunday book."

The colonel was looking across at Lina.

"Then I am to drive my wagonette empty!" he said, only for the sake of saying something; "or shall I go back and persuade Mr. Spendir to take a seat with me?"

"He said he should not go home until dusk," returned Lina, wondering why Sir Neil looked round so suddenly at both the girls, but never coloring under his gaze.

"Do, Colonel Stuart," cried Marjorie, and she *did* color brilliantly as she spoke the genial, ready words, "do fetch him, and bring him to High Athelston, and *do* make Lady Athelston ask him to dinner."

"I think, Marjorie," remarked Sir Neil, with a ridiculous assumption of authority, "that you forget of whom you speak. Don't you think so too, Stuart?"

"I forgot more than that," said the girl, lightly. "I forgot *to* whom I spoke. Now we are ready, Neil."

And Colonel Stuart moved away, puzzled by Marjorie's perpetual changes of voice and face and manner, and with his thoughts rushing over almost the same track as Neil's were taking, yet not in the same narrow groove.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRTH OF A PLOT.

THE long, late dinner over at High Athelston, and the guests were scattered in groups about the brilliant drawing-rooms, many of them strolling through the wide glass doors curtained with pink and white satin, into the conservatories, fragrant and beautiful in the August moonlight;

and one or two young and fearless ones venturing out beyond upon the terraces.

Among the fantastic shadows thrown by the great stone figures on the balustrades, one of these young and fearless guests was walking alone now, looking to the right and left, with the moonlight falling on a bright and excited face, rich quivering lips, parted as if in the anxiousness of some unuttered thought, and beautiful, searching eyes.

"Lina, Lina," she called softly; and at last, though no voice answered, Marjorie saw the girl she sought, leaning against the great stone Ajax on the lowest terrace, her face raised in the moonlight, white as the pure white roses which drooped beside her.

"Lina," said Marjorie, very gently, laying both her warm little hands on Lina's cold, clasped fingers, "don't be angry with me for seeking you and breaking in upon your solitude. Lina, the pain you felt, I felt too; the stabs that hurt you, hurt me too: that's my excuse."

"I had no right to feel them at all," said Lina, in a low voice of pain, unutterably deep; and Marjorie flinched a little to meet the steadfast, sorrowful gaze of the dark, unhappy eyes. "I thought I had learned to bear it all—to bear all slights and all unkindness; but—but I was tired to-night, and miserable, and could not—could not help minding it. Oh! I wish—"

But the intense, passionate whisper broke off there, and Lina's clasped hands—raised passionately for one moment—fell still and motionless again.

"You wish Lady Athelston would let you mingle with her friends only when you choose, you mean?" inquired Marjorie, softly. "She never will, Lina. You are very useful to her; you are always ready to make every thing clear and distinct to her; you are a very pretty object about her rooms; you are something tangible for her to lean upon; and, above all, your presence beside her insures her her son's attention."

"Oh, hush!" cried Lina, her low white brow drawn with a great pain.

"And all these things being in favor of Lady Athelston's keeping you with her," continued Marjorie, still very softly, as she wistfully and sadly watched the pale face below her, "Lady Athelston will never release you until some miracle has extracted the vast leaven of selfishness which her nature contains. But, Lina"—the girl's voice saddened with a great earnestness—"the covert insults which you have undergone to-night have been worse to me than to you. Oh! think, Lina, if they would not have pierced you even more bitterly and more keenly if you had felt that the one who caused them all was your own only sister. You will leave this house some day; you can do so when you like; but I—but I, Lina, can never be any thing but Louisa's sister. I can never, never lose the shame of feeling every thing she does; not as if it were done to myself, but worse—oh! far, far worse—as if it were done *by* myself. You can never have that misery."

"Why does she do it?" asked Lina, in a wondering whisper. "I have never meant to hurt or injure her. I can understand the haughty contempt of those strange ladies; I can understand Mr. Jelfrey's supercilious satire; I can understand Lady Athelston's timid avoidance of me when she sees this; and I—I think I can understand Sir Neil's condescending patronage; but—"

"But you never," smiled Marjorie, with tears in her eyes—"you mean you never shall be able to understand why my sister should have made a point of turning every one against you, misrepresenting you so grossly, and making you so uncomfortable. Well, I'll tell you why it is. It's easily told—it's because she's a beast! Never mind whether it is envy, hatred, or malice. It is originated by a beast, and it is, therefore, unworthy of speculation. How you shudder! Come in; it is drear and chilly here."

For an instant Lina shrunk back; then, with an implicit trust in Marjorie which had been growing upon her ever since she had first seen the bright, brave, merry face, she took the hand offered her.

"You are so good and patient and gentle—so wise and trustful, too!" Marjorie said, stooping impetuously and kissing the delicate lips, "that it seems a mockery for *me* to advise you. But, Lina—and you know we can not be any thing but truthful out here in the great wide calm and beauty of the night—I love you so well that my greatest wish is to help you and make you happier. You will remember this. Promise me to remember this."

But Lina little guessed, as the two girls passed slowly up the broad moonlit steps, hand in hand, for how long she should remember this.

"Miss Chester, Lady Athelston is asking for you. Will you allow me the pleasure of taking her what she seems to miss so sorely?"

Colonel Stuart had met them on the terrace, and, taking no heed of Marjorie, offered his arm to Lina with his pleasantest smile. Marjorie, not behind him in kindly thought for the lonely girl, walked into the drawing-rooms beside them; listening as Colonel Stuart talked to Lina, but waiting while she answered. And Sir Neil seeing them, joined them with a pleasant eagerness.

"As she was obliged to come in again, Miss Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, when they moved away, after lingering a little with Lina and Lady Athelston, "I thought I might come to you."

"You are always kind," replied Marjorie, quietly.

"Poor child! It would have been kinder to have left her with you there."

"It is odd how one girl can find pleasnre in hurting the feelings of another, isn't it?" asked Marjorie, the question really grave and anxious.

"It is odd how any one can find pleasure in hurting the feelings of any one," he answered, smiling.

And the bright color rose in Marjorie's cheeks, and her eyes flashed, because she gave his words a meaning which he had never intended.

In one of the distant recesses of the inner drawing-room, Louisa Castillain sat bending over a book; while Eustace Jelfrey, on a seat beside her, and leaning toward her as if he, too, were intent on the same book, spoke in a lowered tone. For a long time they had been sitting so, while those guests who passed within sight thought how deeply interested they must both be in the plates before them. There was a movement among the brilliant little crowd in the other drawing-rooms, and Louisa rose slowly, and let her companion take the book.

"Then you will manage that," he whispered, his eyes carelessly following his hands as he very deliberately and unnecessarily moved other things on the table to make room for the book he put down. "While we stay here, you will make and take your own opportunity for persuading Lady Athelston to write to whatever address Miss Chester gave her; and I think she will find that all is not as it should be."

"Poor Lady Athelston!" sighed Louisa, with an unconscious smile of cruel jealousy; "she shall not be imposed upon, if I can prevent it."

"You can at least prevent its being continued," insinuated Jelfrey, blandly; "and you are, I know, anxious to do so, as you are anxious to do all kind things. My help will only be of slight service to you, Miss Castillain, but surely you know how happy it always makes me to assist in any thing you undertake."

"Then you leave it with me to get this letter written?" she asked, showing plainly the pride and pleasure that his words had given her; "and, of conrse, without Sir Neil's knowledge?"

"Of course, without Sir Neil's knowledge—yet," he answered, making an effort to speak as if it were of little importance, "and when the letter is ready, Miss Castillain, you will tell me. It will, at any rate, insure me another private interview with you," he added, meaningly; "and so you will give me the promise, to cheer me up until then."

Louisa gave it to him, smiling coyly; grateful herself for any excuse for another interview such as this had been, where they had one close interest in common, and where such whispered words were now and then exchanged. No regret for the treachery that had been whispered hovered in the thoughts of either as they separated that night; only a mean and cruel satisfaction that their plans were mutual, as far as they could safely see to form them.

With ready smiles and gentle kisses, Louisa Castillain hovered about Lady Athelston in her room that night, whispering sympathetic words, which yet had power to stir up a strange, uncomfortable doubt and mistrust in Lady Athelston's bewildered mind, and took Louisa on with steady steps toward the realization of her wish.

"I will leave it now until another time," she thought to herself, smiling still.

Then she kissed "dear Lady Athelston" again, and went with a gay step to the room which Marjorie shared with her, now that the house was so full.

"Asleep already!" she muttered, glancing sharply into her sister's face half buried in the clothes. "She laughs and chatters all day long, then falls asleep like a baby. And I particularly wanted to speak to her before I rang. Marjorie!"

"Don't apostrophize over my prostrate form like a feminine Mark Antony," said Marjorie, opening for a moment the big brown eyes that looked suspiciously sleepless. "You can preach to-morrow. Good-night!"

And Marjorie drew the clothes still higher over her ears, yet tried ineffectually to shut out her sister's running fire of reproof, then of advice, then—worst of all to Marjorie—of sarcastic comment on the solitary girl who, far away in another wing of the house, sat at her window, "thinking, thinking, thinking," while the moon rode slowly over the grand old gloomy hills.

CHAPTER XI.

LAYING THE TRAIN.

"But the other ladies have promised. Do come, Miss Chester. Why shouldn't you? The drag will be round at twelve, and we shall meet you in the birch coppice for lunch. Don't be the only one to disappoint us, Miss Chester."

Sir Neil Athelston, in his velveteen shooting-coat, his felt hat in his hand, and his face growing angry in its eagerness, lingered in his mother's room, while the gentlemen gathered in the hall below, and wondered why he did not come.

"You will come, Miss Chester?" he persisted, heeding not an atom whether his mother heard his entreaty or not. "Promise me."

"Don't ask me any more, please, Sir Neil," answered Lina, turning to him, and speaking very firmly and decidedly. "Nothing you could say would persuade me."

"Why not? Why, in the name of Heaven, have I no power to move you? Do you hear others set my com—my wishes at defiance as you do?"

"No," she answered, gently; "therefore you may well afford, Sir Neil, to dispense with my obedience."

"I won't," cried Neil, carried beyond himself by wrath, as he watched the proud, still firmness of the girl's delicate lips; "I won't dispense with the only obedience I care one straw about. Every soul in the house may do what they please, if you will listen to my wishes. Say you will come."

"Neil," put in his mother from the window where she sat, speaking rather querulously because her son seemed to be angry with her companion, "the keepers are here, and have been waiting for a long time. You always *do* keep every body waiting. Go, my dear. The ladies and the lunch will be at the coppice before you have bagged a solitary bird. I shall not be able to go with them to-day, but Mrs. Esdaile will take my place."

"May Miss Chester come?" asked Sir Neil; so easily now that neither of his listeners guessed with what anxiety he spoke.

"No, I shall want her. What does she care about such things?"

"Mother," said Neil into the trumpet, his voice shaking a little with suppressed amusement, "Louisa Castillain is awfully anxious to stay at home with you, only she doesn't like to offer, she says. She wants you to ask her. She loves you tremendously; in fact, she's never quite happy unless she is with you—never."

"Does Louisa really wish to stay with me?" asked Lady Athelston. "How do you know?"

"Marjorie told me—in confidence, though," replied Neil, a falsehood more or less being of little consequence to him; "but you are to ask her yourself, and not to pretend that we've spoken of it. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," was the pleased reply. "Louisa is very fond of me."

"*Passionnément*," put in Neil, solemnly. "But you see now, mother, you must send away Miss Chester, because she and Louisa never agree."

"Yes," assented Lady Athelston, with an instinct of the necessity of this, "Miss Chester can go."

"There!" cried Neil, raising his head from the

trumpet, with an air of great relief, "you are conquered, Miss Chester; but, to make assurance doubly sure, I shall leave it in Marjorie's hands."

"No, please," argued Lina, earnestly; "because, if she asks me, I must go."

"I know you must," laughed Neil, delighted. "How I shall look out for the carriage now, and not for the sake of the lunch—not quite! Good-bye for a few hours. Good-bye, my little friend."

Then Neil, his handsome face unclouded again, ran down-stairs, and left his commands in Marjorie Castillain's hand, drawing her a little apart from the other guests in the hall.

"Poor little thing, it will be a change for her," he concluded, flushing duskily under Marjorie's calm gaze. "The mother keeps her so preciously close in a general way. And she is so fond of you, Marjorie, that she will be sure to enjoy this with you. No wonder she is fond of you, dear," he added, with a slight qualm, "you are so good to her, and so like one of us. I mean to say—"

"You don't quite know what you mean to say, Neil," returned Marjorie, carefully picking an end of his mother's wool from his brown sleeve; "but providentially I always understand as well what you leave unsaid as what you say; so—it's all right."

One or two of the gentlemen were envying him a little as he lingered with his betrothed; for had they not seen her gentle touch upon his arm? But Neil turned away, feeling rather uncomfortable, wishing he had not seemed so much in earnest over this.

"Louisa," he said, in a voice whose ease and coldness sounded refreshing even to himself after its late warmth and anxiety, "my mother is awfully anxious to have you at home with her this afternoon; too bad of her, isn't it? But she seems to have set her heart upon it. I don't think she's ever happy without you, Louisa. But I must tell you this, she is so fearful of your staying against your will, that she won't be happy unless you can be generous enough to consent very readily. I am vexed, because I hoped to see you in the coppice; but mother will be lost without you. You are so very amusing with her, and possess such a fund of narrative."

Neil left off there, afraid of laughing. But Louisa Castillain guessed nothing of this. Her whole face brightened as she glanced across at Jelfrey.

"I will stay gladly, Neil," she said; "I always like to give dear Lady Athelston a little pleasure."

And Neil thanked her so heartily that Colonel Stuart—standing near and examining his gun—guessed rather more of his reason than Sir Neil would have cared to acknowledge.

"Start early, Mrs. Esdaile; we trust to you," the young baronet said gayly, as, with the dogs around him, he looked back from the hall-door; raising his hat from a face which never could have been so careless or so happy if he had known for what a cruel work his own selfish plans had smoothed the way.

When the shooting party returned that evening, merry and muddy and tired, the ladies—who had driven home an hour earlier—were in their own rooms, resting before they began to dress for dinner; all except one, who *happened* to be passing slowly along the east corridor as Mr. Jelfrey entered it on the way to his own room at the farther end.

"We have arranged it all," she said, in a hurried tone of congratulation. "I've written the letter myself. Lady Athelston asked me to do it for her, and Sir Neil is not to know."

Eustace Jelfrey smiled down into Louisa Castillain's flushed, fair face, reading it steadily for a few moments. What he saw there—the light, shallow eyes were easily read—satisfied him that what she did, she did for him; no scruple of conscience hurting her, no generous qualm hindering her; and he trusted in her just so deeply and just so steadfastly as such natures trust in those which are a little higher than their own, in that they are powerless to sound the deeper and more sinful motive, and a little lower than their own, in that they obey in very weakness the guiding of the stronger will.

"How is the letter to be posted, Mr. Jelfrey?" asked Louisa, fidgeting coyly with the ribbons on her dress, and speaking with insinuating slowness, as she felt that he was still gazing into her bent face.

"Leave that to me," he answered, gayly. "I knew you would succeed; every thing is safe in your hands. Have you the letter with you? I will take it to the village office myself before I dress. I have more than half an hour to spare. Will you give it to me?"

"Yes," cried Louisa, ready in an instant to obey, yet evidently wishing to tell him more. "Lady Athelston did not know the number of the house in Berkeley Square, so she sent for Miss Chester; and I came away to—prevent the girl seeing me there. You said you thought it better that no one should recognize our part in this."

"I *agreed* that it was better, far better," replied Jelfrey, with an emphasis which would convey that he had only acceded to a proposal of hers.

"Although our part is taken in simple kindness to dear Lady Athelston," resumed Louisa.

"Yes," returned the tutor, promptly. "How did Miss Chester take it?"

"I met her coming out of Lady Athelston's room a few minutes ago—in fact, only as I came along here to meet Marjorie," she answered, never guessing how he detected her untruth the moment it was uttered. "She always looks white enough, doesn't she? but I never saw any face so deathly white as hers was then. I spoke to her, trying to judge how great her craven fear might be, and she really could not answer me for a time. Then, do you know, she spoke quite calmly. There is such a strange power in guilt," added the girl, innocently, "to cloak itself under a calm and indifferent manner. But I could see her real terror, and knew what was meant when she complained of a horrible headache, and said she was going to her room. Of course I sympathized, and asked her to try to come down, but she answered me in real panic. She must lie down, she said; she sometimes did have these severe headaches, and rest was the only thing to take them away. But I don't believe, Mr. Jelfrey, that she ever had a headache like this before—do you?"

Jelfrey laughed, and then they separated; the letter in his pocket, and his whispered words of flattery ringing in her ears.

The smile that lingered on her lips when she entered her own room angered Marjorie a good deal; because it was, as the younger sister said to herself, the hypocritical smile which boded harm for some one. Marjorie, in her morning-dress, was idly sitting before a table in the bow-window, her chin resting on her hands, and her eyes on the glowing sky above the hills.

"You are a nice, sociable companion!" said her sister, having waited in vain for her to speak. "Can't you tell me something about the afternoon, instead of sitting mooning there?"

"Yes, I could tell you lots of things," rejoined Marjorie, absently. "Of whom shall I tell you first?"

"You lunched all together, of course, in the coppice?"

"Yes, and ate an enormous luncheon, every one of us. I never saw Eustace Jelfrey so greedy or so gay."

Louisa darted a swift look into her sister's face, and her lips tightened viciously. But something in the absent, far-away brown eyes (in which the old drollery lurked) stopped the words that were coming.

"She does it only to provoke me," Miss Castillain thought to herself, "and she shall not see that she has the power. "And Emily Jorden was in her seventh heaven, I suppose?" she said, aloud.

"Seventeenth, I fancy. I could hardly recognize her on the heights to which the handsome tutor's devotion led her."

"And Sir Neil?" inquired Louisa, with spiteful emphasis, "of course his devotion was for you alone?"

"Sir Neil is too polite a host to bestow all his devotion on one lady, however worthy," replied the girl, demurely.

"Then Miss Chester had a trifling share, eh?" resumed Louisa, yawning as she looked round on the preparation for her elaborate toilet.

"You are always correct in your remarks," Marjorie said. "Why an unnecessary interrogation at the end?"

"And Colonel Stuart," asked Louisa, with a keen, cold look into her sister's face, "I suppose he paid marked attention to Lady Athelston's companion, as usual? If it were not that he is getting old, and is such a thoroughly confirmed widower (which is as bad as an old bachelor), he would get laughed at for his ridiculous attention to that girl."

"What a good thing it must be to be getting old!" mused Marjorie, her eyes still on the distant crimson of the sunset sky, her chin still resting on her warm, white hands.

"His absurd conduct to the girl is, after all, though, no more absurd than your behavior toward that pettifogging artist in Nether Lane," continued Louisa, with slow scorn. "Every body is remarking upon it. I should not like my conduct to be spoken of as yours is now. And you make no secret of your infatuation."

"An artist," said Marjorie, with quiet gravity, "may rank even with a miser's daughter."

"Even owning that artists, as a rule, rank with the aristocracy," replied Louisa—"and you won't get the aristocracy to own it—such an artist as this would not be included. Bah! he is not worth calling an artist! He's a mere vagabond, and it was an insult to us for him to have been introduced among us."

"He never wished to be introduced among us, I'm sure," rejoined Marjorie, uttering no depreciation of his talents, as she had done to Lina. "We are not such gods and goddesses here in Highshire. But, as I like him very much," she added, her eyes taking their old laughter, as she rose and rang the bell, "and intend to woo him from his vagabond ways—'homeless, ragged, and tanned,' you know—I hope you'll make much of him, for your poor sister's sake."

"Good gracious, Marjorie!" cried Louisa, vulgar in her excitement as the mean-hearted often are, "don't let other people hear you say the mad things you say to me. Will you never know what belongs to your position?"

"The finest brace of birds which Colonel Stuart brought down," continued Marjorie, her voice full of laughter now as well as her eyes, "he himself took to the cottage in Nether Lane, to leave for Mr. Spendir; and I went with him, and Miss Chester went with me, and Sir Neil went with her, and Lady Helen went with him. Oh, Lady Helen was stiff to-day! She was a living amalgamation of jealousy and spleen and starch, and—and poor little Miss Chester's happiness was any thing but unmixed."

"And you really all made such donkeys of yourselves as to go to that place and carry game for that man?"

"No; not all," was the calm answer. "Mr. Jelfrey never could so far forget himself, and Emily Jorden never could so far forget *him;* and of course the others did not. I wonder what I'd better wear to-night. I feel so terribly lowered by my visit to *that place* and my interest in *that man.*"

"Your mockery does not hurt me," returned Louisa, pulling again snappishly at the bell; "you always reserve all your amiable conversation for me."

"You never talk of any thing I care about," the younger sister answered, with a sound almost like a sob in her voice. "You don't care for what I care for. You don't scorn the things I scorn. I—I suppose it never will be."

"I wish strangers knew how very unfascinating you are at times," remarked Louisa, stolidly, "however different you may appear before them."

"They will surely know it presently," rejoined Marjorie, very calm and cold again, "for constant information on the subject will fix it on their minds at last, and you will be rewarded—as all virtue is."

The maid had entered the room by this time, and the sisters hardly spoke again, except to her, until they went down-stairs together, the lamplight falling richly on them, glancing among the satin folds of Louisa's long white dress, and softening the harshness as well as subduing the haughtiness of her cold, regular features; chasing away the weary look that had lingered so long on Marjorie's piquant face, while it cast dainty sunset-tinted rays on the thin pink dress which cost just one-sixth of what her sister had paid for hers, but to which the graceful *élancé* figure gave an elegance that was priceless. Then the elder sister said, with careless nonchalance,

"We shall have no *contretemps* to-night, at any rate, for Miss Chester is not coming down. Why she ever should have come down among us, I can not imagine. She is keeping her room for some mysterious reason or other."

And Marjorie answered not a word, but her steps slackened and she fell behind. From the bottom of the wide, lighted staircase, Louisa looked up with a sneer on her lips, but the girl was following, though slowly; following with her gloved hand on the balusters, humming softly as she came. Seeing her so, and having no legitimate cause of complaint, Miss Castillain went on, and entered the drawing-room alone.

Then suddenly the gay *insouciance* left Marjorie's face, the notes died on her lips. With swift, light steps she ascended the stairs again, and at Lina's door bent her mouth to the key-hole, entreating to be let in. The voice, true and bright and earnest, carried a message of hope as well as pity to the desolate girl within, who sat alone, shivering with fear in the shadow of a coming trouble.

CHAPTER XII.

STOLEN.

Beyond the hills the crimson light had faded. There was certainly a full and efficient substitute in the long dining-room at High Athelston, where gay voices mingled with soft high-bred laughter, and the glow of fire and lamp-light gleamed on shining plate and crystal, or darted coyly here and there among the jewels; but, without the great lighted mansion, the park lay dark and chill; darkest of all in the great avenue, down which a girl's figure—small and darkly dressed—was passing swiftly.

Never once did Lina Chester pause until she reached the high entrance gates, over which the lamps were burning on either side the stone leopards.

"Will you unlock the little side-gate for me, please?" she asked the lodge-keeper, timidly, yet with the gentle dignity which, in all her humility, was inseparable from her. "The post-bag was gone before I was aware, and I want to go to the post-office in the village."

"Law, Miss Chester," cried the woman, astonished, "to think of your being here, out by yourself, and the house so full! Haven't you a key of the bag?—because it's here waiting. The mail-cart doesn't pass till nine."

"No, I have no key," said Lina, her lips cold and stiff. "I must go on to the village—I don't mind, it is such a short distance. It is not as if I had to go to Churchill."

"Of course you couldn't go *there*, miss," ejaculated the woman, decisively. "Come in, please, and rest a bit; and my little girl shall take the letter."

"Oh no, thank you," returned Lina, in quick fear; "I would rather go myself."

The woman smiled incredulously, and made a guess which, to be sure, was a very natural one: "My lady's companion had an acquaintance, to whom she wrote on the sly."

"If you'll wait here half an hour, miss," she said, aloud, "you can give the letter yourself to the driver of the mail-cart, and he'll post it for you; you've only to give him a trifle. It's sure to go safe, and you can give it to him yourself, to make sure."

"I can not wait, thank you," said Lina, her voice shaking more and more. "I shall be back at High Athelston, I hope, in less than half an hour. Will you let me out now, please?"

With a sigh at the willfulness of the girl, looking so beautiful and so fragile in the uncertain light, the lodge-keeper opened the gate; and, after one more earnest entreaty to be allowed to send her little girl with Miss Chester, she let her out into the deepening shadows of the wide, open road.

"I couldn't help it," she muttered to herself, locking the gate again; "I hope I sha'n't be blamed. If all's true that we hear, Sir Neil wouldn't care to know this; and if it is a sweetheart she writes to—as what else could it be to take her out in this way?—the sight of the letter would bring him into one of his worst tempers."

Along the silent highway went Lina swiftly, too intent on one thought and one desire to notice whether or not she met any other human being between High Athelston and the village post-office.

A little cottage it was, next to the village ale-house, where a group who stood at the door stopped for a minute in their noisy talk to watch the little dark figure hurry up the cottage garden. One quick hope nerved Lina's courage as she rapped at the door, but it was dispelled at once when she entered the kitchen; for, though only a low fire burned on the hearth, and a small candle upon the table under the window, the old couple who kept the office knew her in a moment.

She had not thought how hard it would be for her to pass unrecognized by the people round High Athelston, among whom her exquisite beauty and her incomprehensible avoidance of the young baronet were prolific themes of wonder and discussion; and among whom her gentle, courteous sympathy was given in just the way they liked best.

"Am I in time with a letter?" she asked, feeling in her pocket slowly, and looking around her with a strange eagerness literally burning in her dark eyes.

"If the bag 'ad been sealed, Miss Chester," said the woman, as she brought forward a chair, "it should 'a be'n in time for you. I'd undo it myself if the master 'adn't adone it."

"Thank you," replied Lina—"thank you very much; but I'm glad not to have given you that trouble. You are already sorting, I see," she added, glancing with painful intentness at the letters which the old man had been dividing by the light of the candle on a table under the window.

"Yes, miss; and I'll sit down again if you'll excuse me," he answered, pushing his spectacles down to their place on his broad nose. "I've only five minutes more."

"Go on—please go on," entreated Lina, quickly, "while I sit and rest for a few minutes, as—as I don't feel very well. Here's my letter."

It was a commonplace-looking letter enough, addressed to Miss M'Mullen, No. 7 Conduit Street, London; but yet the hand which laid it on the table trembled so that the fingers could not be trusted to place it on any certain heap; and the voice which said, "Which are the London letters?" was but a weak and unsteady whisper.

"Here, miss. Thank you. Them's the London letters, but I 'spects I've more here."

And Lina, watching breathlessly and with a throb of pain as each letter was read by the poor

light, could yet join in the running conversation which the old woman required all the time.

"Miss Chester! Good mercy me, Miss Chester! what's the matter?"

"I'm faint," gasped Lina, pushing with both hands the thick, dark hair from her temples, and raising a pair of wide, wild eyes to the woman's face—"I'm faint. Can you—can you—get me a little brandy? Quick, please."

"Go, go!" cried the woman, shaking by the shoulder the poor old man, who sat by the table, alarmed and bewildered. "Go into the public and get it. We can settle for it after, only be quick. Oh, Miss Chester! what shall we do? You must be so awful ill."

"Is he gone?" asked Lina, still gazing at the woman, as if her sight were deserting her. "Is he gone? Will he be long?"

"Not long—not long, my dear," the old woman said, soothingly, longing to put her pitiful arms round the slight, drooping form.

"Will he be quick?"

"Yes, he'll be quick, my dear. He's sure to be quick," she said, coming a little nearer, in her great pity, and slipping one arm round the girl's shoulder to support her.

"You are very good," whispered Lina, still with the miserable bewilderment in her eyes, "very good; but would you be kinder still? Would you go and hasten him? They will keep him. Oh, do go and hasten him!"

"I don't like to leave you," said the woman, softly, while her eyes filled.

"Please go!" cried the girl, in intense eagerness, clasping her hand unconsciously.

And the old post-mistress, unable to meet the entreating gaze of Lina's eyes—so unnaturally big and dark to-night in the white face—turned away at once.

"I'll go, my dear," she said comfortingly; "I won't be a minute."

Slowly Lina Chester rose when she was left alone, trembling in every limb, and supporting herself by the table. One hand, shaking helplessly, moved the top letter from one of the heaps, and took away one that lay next below it, replacing them all evenly without this. More and more the slight white fingers trembled as she put this letter into her pocket; and the face, white and scared and guilty, which met her in the common glass that hung beside the window, made her start back as if a blow had struck her.

"I am ill," she murmured to herself, speaking in that tone of self-pity and self-vindication which only the utterly desolate ever use; "I wish—oh, how I wish that was all!"

They came in then with the brandy in a tumbler, and Lina—instinctively recoiling from it—had yet to sip it while they stood and watched; watched her as if they feared that when she put the glass down she would fall.

In quiet, broken tones she thanked them; but when she turned to leave, the good old woman followed her out into the dark little garden, and took her hand to link within her sturdy arm.

"I'll not leave you, miss, I couldn't; so please don't say it."

So they walked from the village together in the darkness, and in a few minutes the mail-cart rattled along the road behind them, and the bag was put in.

In the light of the lamps at the park-gates Lina stood to thank and dismiss the old post-mistress. Then, her step still weak and slow, she passed again along the silent avenue. But, instead of entering the house, she hurried on across the wide, still park, and came out into the dense darkness, among the elms in Nether Lane.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARTIST'S COTTAGE.

Fitz Spendir, stooping over his work at the cottage window that evening, stopped his low, clear whistling for a minute, and raised his head, intent and listening. Presently he bent it once more over the block which he was preparing for the engraver, and whistled again, this time only four clear notes, which made a call.

"All right, dad—what is it?"

The call had been answered promptly enough, for the child he summoned came instantly into the open door-way between the two rooms, and stood there wiping his hands on a small brown towel.

"Look on the chimney-piece, Jet," said the artist, going on with his work. "There's a sixpence and three pennies. Take the pennies to that fellow at the gate. He does not look very saint-like; but a penny or two can't make him worse, any more than the torrent of abuse he's had next door can make him better."

"She's blowing up now, dad," said the boy, opening the door, and hesitating. "I wish she'd go in."

"Frightened—eh?" laughed the artist, "and not ashamed to show it! Bah! Run off."

But Jet did not run off at all; on the contrary, he walked very slowly, and took care to leave the door open behind him. So Fitz, though he took up the broken strain of "The Standard-bearer" again, as he bent industriously over his block, still heard, above it, the shrill, raised tones of his next-door neighbor.

"Much use it is trying to keep away scamps from one's house when they're encouraged in one's very face. Some people don't mind, of course, because they've nothing to lose; but I have things to lose, and I'll appeal against money and bribery being given at my own door, and in my very face, to vagabonds who skulk about, and do no work, and for all I know are ticket-of-leave men. A nice sort to attract about one!"

Over the artist's face—turned full to the window now—a death-like pallor spread, blanching the lips that were half hidden in the rich brown beard, and drawing them with a great and passionate pain. The voices—his own boy's now joined with the woman's—went on outside, but no word reached his ears.

"Dad, dad!" cried Jet, entering presently, with his small white face wet with tears, and shutting the door behind him, carefully, this time; "she—she—she shook me!"

"Then you'd done something wrong," rejoined Fitz, his lips still white and stiff, while he tried, almost savagely, to regain his ease.

"No, I hadn't—no, I hadn't indeed, dad. I only said, 'If she was poor and came to beg, she'd rather have a penny than a scolding.'"

The artist's voice was shaken by a curbed and

fierce excitement. "Move off, I'll go and apologize for you."

"No, father; please don't," urged the child. "I quite meant it."

"And I'm not to say you're sorry?" he asked, surprised, bending his face—so full of strength and power, yet so full of gentleness—upon the earnest one beside him.

"No; because it wasn't a fib. You know it wasn't, dad."

"All right. I'll stay where I am, then," he said, raising his head with a sudden gesture, as if shrinking from something which had a strong fascination for him; "and you little know, laddie, what you have stopped. Apology!" he added, with a low laugh of intense satire. "There's little of the angel in me; mine would have been rather a savage apology — but never mind. It shall stand over once more. Only a woman; a woman alone with the pestilence of a black temper; solitary, too, as we are ourselves; and has had trouble too—if death ever does bring trouble, as they say it does. I don't know. I can only dream of one thing worth calling trouble."

"What, dad? Why are you mumbling? Stop drawing, and tell me about supper."

"Supper!" laughed the artist, raising his eyebrows at the anxious little face.

"Yes, supper," whined Jet; "I didn't care a bit about tea, because we'd no sugar, and it's so bitter without sugar and cream."

"Bitterer than most things, eh? Well, and what's the supper to be?"

"You said we should have sausages, dad," proposed the child, wistfully.

"Did I? Very well. Take that sixpence, and get half a pound. Don't stop in the town at all."

"Am I to bring you a bottle of beer, dad?"

"No, not to-night," was the quick reply. "We can't stand that every night, you know; only when we've had a *very* hard day's work."

"I wish we weren't poor," whined the boy. "Mrs. Cheere made such an ugly frown to-day when she said you ought to send me to school; and did so laugh when I told her you couldn't, because you couldn't afford it."

"You needn't tell her more than necessary, laddie," said the artist, again checking his passion by a strong, brave effort. "Whatever she says to you—if you can't walk away out of hearing—just quietly bear it, like a man. Poor lad!" he muttered, with a smile, "it is so easy to tell a child to bear things like a man, and so very hard for a man to bear them any way to make an example of. Look at the braid on your coat-sleeve," he continued, with a light change in his voice. "You can't go into the town until you've mended it."

"Won't you do it, father?"

"No; I'm too busy now; I want to make the most of the daylight. You can do it yourself famously."

"Jack Esdaile never mends his own coat, I know," grumbled Jet, "nor washes himself; and he always has buttons on. I believe the tailor puts them on. No other boys have to do every thing, like I have, dad."

"Don't they?" smiled Fitz, always wonderfully patient with the boy during his occasional fits of gloomy discontent and rebellion. "But still I don't quite see why you should envy them. You are happy, I know, my lad; and what more can any boys be—even little princes?"

"I expect I *could* be happier, dad," said the child, with a strange pathos in his young voice.

"Every body thinks that, dear. Perhaps little Jack Esdaile fancies that he might be happier."

"I don't think he does," was the boy's answer. "It's his birthday to-day, and he told me what lots of presents he had. Dad, when's my birthday?"

"I don't know; I—forget," the artist answered, as the dusky red rose slowly in his sunburned face.

"Do you, dad?" Jet asked, astonished. "Jack said you'd tell me, and Colonel Stuart said it too. He came in when we were talking of it, and he asked me all about what I could remember when I was little."

"Colonel Stuart is very good to you, laddie," said the artist, putting in the words rather hurriedly.

"Oh, so good, father!" was the enthusiastic reply. "He says I can go to The Anchorage whenever I like, and he always keeps me to Jack's tea, and he—he puts his hand on my head just as he does on Jack's. Oh, father, shouldn't we be happy if we had a beautiful house like Jack's?"

"Hope on, work on, laddie," said the artist, gently, "and some day your home will be as beautiful—*as* beautiful," he added, with a smile that was sarcastic in all its dreamy gentleness.

"Will it, father?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"God only knows, my boy. But do you think I could work as I work now, only for years and years untold of *this* life—of *this* home?"

"But, dad" (the boy's voice had caught some of the earnest patience of the man's, but was doubtful still, and rather regretful), "you don't mean Heaven, do you?"

Fitz drew the child into his arms, with a quick laugh which told nothing.

"Now, then, laddie, get a needle and mend your sleeve."

As the child sat at the opposite end of the room, his face bent low over his hands, sewing awkwardly at the binding of his jacket, the artist's eyes rested upon him with a strange, sorrowful tenderness in their gaze.

"If this could be bound all fresh, it would be a good deal better, father," put in Jet, without raising his engrossed eyes.

"I dare say."

Then the artist went on busily with his work, and did not look up again.

"I suppose I'm growing, dad," said Jet, when he rose at last, and put on his tight little coat.

"Well, and who asked you to grow, pray?" Fitz answered, merrily. So strangely, suddenly sad or merry he could be, as if the whole teaching of his life had been at variance with his nature.

"Do you know who's going to give me a penny for a bun when I go, father?" questioned Jet, anxiously, now that he was ready.

"No, who is it?"

"I don't know, father," rejoined the boy, thoughtfully. "I was wondering."

"So was I," laughed Fitz. "Let's set the

wonder at rest. The fair Dorcas will see you eating the bun though, and give it sharply as her opinion that it's no wonder I can't put you to school, when I spend all the money we get on 'bilious tantaddlings.' You remember she said it before."

"She's very cross; isn't she, father?" was the gentle remark, as the child put the money into his little basket with old-fashioned caution.

"Not so much cross as cantankerous; and that word's expressive according to its length. Now, old fellow, make haste."

"And, father," pleaded the boy, hesitating on the threshold, "after supper may be you'll play 'Old Maid.'"

The artist's laugh was fresh and spontaneous.

"All right, laddie, we'll enjoy half an hour at that suggestive and appropriate game. Then, after you go to bed, I must pluck one of Colonel Stuart's birds for our dinner to-morrow, unless I leave it for you in the morning. Now be off."

Even when he was left alone, the laugh lingered in the artist's eyes.

"What a relief it is when the ludicrous side of the cards is uppermost!" he said, moving away from his fine pencil-drawing, and beginning to paint rapidly at a great, highly colored board which he took from its covering. "There's almost always a ludicrous side to show in this life of ours —Jet's and mine. Poor Jet!—poor little lad! There's something almost touching, yet irresistibly comic too, in his fear, yet defiance, of our neighbor—the vixen! Just suppose she had little Jack Esdaile to deal with; or, indeed, any child who had not had his restless little spirit tamed and subdued as my lad's must be. It seems to me that—that all the happiness on earth is due to money," mused the artist, sitting before the gorgeous sign he was painting. "But I haven't quite settled that question with myself yet. Didn't Miss Castillain say something the very opposite, the other day? Ah! but what a difference it makes whether those who speak possess it or want it! One thousand pounds!"

The brush was moved rapidly, daringly; and the artist's eyes followed it, but withal they had the look which told of one close, concentrated thought, and one vague, distant ambition unresistingly pursued.

"One thousand pounds, and the interest for four years! Suppose—suppose," mused Fitz, as if to dismiss that other thought, "that I had no cause to save—that I had no purpose for which to save; and could spend all I earned. Suppose that I hadn't to take any little pettifogging job that turned up; and be grateful for it too, as I am for this, which will no sooner be put up, I dare say, than all the world will blurt out the painter's name to Colonel Stuart, from whom I'm keeping it hidden so carefully. It does go against the grain to paint this leopard; and yet it may be a good joke in years to come. 'The Athelston Arms.' Capital! And the arm that painted it can boast of no better deed through all its life! What's that about the leopard changing its spots? And all the Athelstons. But just suppose," the artist went on, again dismissing suddenly his old train of thought, "some one were to give me a hundred pounds, and tell me I must spend it on comfortable things—personal sort of things. Let me see what I should do. First I should buy—"

The long, calculating silence—during which Fitz in imagination spent his hundred pounds—was broken by the opening of the door, and he turned laughingly to the boy.

"I'm glad you are come, old fellow. I'd got to ninety pounds, and couldn't find any thing more I wanted. What a relief it is to come back to reality, and find I haven't got it to spend at all!"

Of course the child did not understand what this meant, and he was too full of some misery of his own to heed it.

"I didn't have my bun, dad," he said, through thick tears. "A big boy fought me, and took it."

"*And* the sausages?" asked Fitz, coolly.

"No, I didn't let him see those; but he hurt me, dad."

"And you hurt him, I suppose?" was the easy question, though Fitz Spendir's eyes were wrathful as he drew the persecuted boy to him.

"No, dad, not much, I—fear," said the child honestly, raising his wet eyes. "I was beaten. There; I knew you'd laugh, dad, and say I was a coward."

"Beaten boys are not all cowards, Jet," he answered, kindly. "Shall I tell you of one who was not?"

"Please, dad;" and the wet face brightened a little.

"Well, this boy once had a fight with a girl! Think of that; and a girl two years younger than himself; and he came off beaten abjectly, conquered ignominiously, and in abundant tears, too. Should you have said he was a coward?"

"Of course, dad, when he was beaten by a smaller girl."

"Of course, eh? Well, that proves how little you know about it, old fellow. That boy grew up into the bravest and cleverest soldier in the world, and did what lots of brave and clever men had tried to do and couldn't; and the conquering girl was never heard of afterward, that I know of. But I dare say she may have been living in some quiet corner, and may have read of the glorious victories this boy gained. They called him the Duke of Wellington in those days."

"Oh, dad! and is it true?"

"As true as that he was the conqueror at Waterloo. Now, make haste and get our supper, laddie."

While the boy cooked the sausages with comical deftness, and the artist went on indefatigably with his work, they told each other stories, asked each other riddles, amusing each other, as it had grown upon them to do in their solitary life, and their laughter was prompt and ready. Yet upon both faces there lingered a something which, if those who loved them had been near to-night, it would have given a cruel pain to see.

The sausages had been eaten and enjoyed; the game of "Old Maid" had been won—as it generally was—by Jet, with great complacency; and now the child was sleeping upstairs, and the artist sat beside the dying fire, and absently hummed the chorus of "Beautiful Isle of the Sea," as he plucked a partridge. Even over this, his fingers were rapid and dexterous; it seemed as if the man had no room in his life for either listlessness or indifference.

The rich, softened notes broke off suddenly, for at the cottage-door Fitz heard a quiet rap-

ping. He laid the bird down in the basket that held the feathers, and rose with a vexed surprise upon his face—a look of fear, too, that was half defiant. But all this vanished in a moment when he opened the door upon Lina Chester.

CHAPTER XIV.

GONE.

When Lina had entered the cottage, she turned in silence, and bolted the door behind her; then she raised her white, scared face, and Fitz, bending his bronzed and bearded one to meet it, kissed her very, very tenderly.

"My little pet, my poor little pet! What has frightened you to-night? Whose work is this?" he asked, his voice growing hot and passionate through all his tender greeting. Lina drew back a little and looked up at him, trying to bring a smile into her eyes instead of the hunted, frightened look which she knew that he could read there. And, standing so, she laid the letter on the table beside him, and told him how, and why, she had just stolen it from the office.

She did not modify the word. She did not try to hide one shade of her deceit or guilt. She told him the simple facts, in a hurried, whispered tone, which made the few fierce words that now and then interrupted her sound all the more clear and startling.

"If I had my hand upon that rascal's throat this moment, I should think it no sin to leave him dead there on the floor!"

She never tried to calm him, seeming to know how useless that would be; but when she uttered again the tutor's name she roused more hotly still the furious demon within him.

"Jelfrey!" The sarcastic tone was loud and fierce in the very intensity of its abhorrence. "Don't name *him* again. Though I should loathe my own hands if they touched him, I should think it no sin to murder *him*."

So the artist spoke in his savage anger, leaning his back heavily against the thin, slight wall of which he knew or guessed so little.

"Show me what you are painting now?" whispered Lina, her voice gentle and soothing, though still moved and shaken by pain. "Miss Marjorie Castillain told me of your last illustration, the view at the tarn. She often tells me of you."

"Does she?" asked the artist, the dusky red in his cheeks, and a softening light in his eyes. "God bless her!"

"She *is* good," said Lina, with deep earnestness. "And is—is that really the last illustration which will be wanted? And is your work here over now?"

"It ought to be," Fitz said, as they stood together over the block, "it would be if Colonel Stuart were like any one else, but he gives me another thing to do as I finish one; and—I think through him—I have had one or two small orders from houses in Churchill. And, now that I have nearly finished, he has commissioned me to copy a curious old family portrait for his sister, as the original belongs to him."

"He is good, too; very good," breathed Lina, softly.

"So good," replied the artist, as he cautiously put aside the block, "that it is no burden to a man to owe so much to him. And even that serpent is safe, being in his household. It is only by meeting such a man as he that I can keep a spark of manly truthfulness alive in me; and even then it's hard enough at times. God only knows how hard, when my thoughts have their fling, and travel backward through your life and mine, my little pet."

They were standing close together then, and for long minutes they spoke of that past, in hushed and saddened tones. Then Lina, suddenly recollecting herself, looked wistfully up through her tears into the strong, kind face above her.

"I must go ho—I must go back now," she said. And he answered only, putting a strong constraint upon himself,

"Come, I will take you."

"Only to your own gate," she said, quite firmly and decisively, though with the old loneliness and fear growing again in her eyes, now that she was leaving him. "You have left the letter," she added, hesitating just without the door.

"Never mind," he whispered (for they were close to Mrs. Cheere's lighted window), "I will burn it when I go in; the pleasure will reconcile me to my solitude. I shall take it up with the tongs, like a tainted thing as it is. Let it lie there, without a thought wasted on it."

"There is no fear of any one going in and seeing it, I suppose?" questioned Lina, still anxious.

"Mine is not a likely mansion to attract thieves of any kind," said the artist, laughing low. "Besides, if they are coming, they must pass us at the gate. No, not yet," he added, as Lina stopped at the wicket; "I must come just a few steps down the lane with you."

Only a few steps literally did she allow him to take; and then he sauntered back, his head bent in thought, his eyes so far away that they saw nothing in the shadow of the hedge, as he closed the gate and turned into the silent garden.

The cottage-door still stood open, and the little lamp was burning as he had left it. Almost before he was conscious what it was, Fitz Spendir missed something. He looked round, the brows coming down over his eyes. The letter! Yes; it had been left upon the table, here beside the lamp, and it was gone.

The artist's eyes, darkening with a terrible fear and rage, went over the small room from end to end. Then he turned suddenly, and left the house, his breath coming quick and hard. A sharp, short summons at Mrs. Cheere's door roused her from the placid enjoyment of a glass of mulled elder-wine, which she always "took medicinally" before going to bed.

"I have been away from home for five minutes," said the artist, breaking in upon her, almost grand in his curbed wrath and excitement. "Do you know who has been in my house during my absence?"

"If I keep my own house quiet and unmolested, I think it's about as much as need be expected of a woman," rejoined Dorcas, stiffly. "I never heard that I was expected to mind yours too."

"You haven't been in, then?" inquired Fitz, caring nothing for her rudeness.

"I?" retorted Dorcas, with a scornful sniff which died away in a laugh of contemptuous as-

tonishment; "I'd be sorry to go over your door-sill, I would!"

"Then you don't know?" asked Fitz, anxiously.

"If you are sober, I should think you know yourself," she answered, stirring her wine, with cool scorn; "unless you killed him, as you threatened. Didn't he go in to bring you Colonel Stuart's message, though I tried to persuade him against it, when he'd real need to be afraid of murder?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Fitz, aghast.

"Just what I say. And now I should think you can go, and not stare a person out of countenance like that, at unseemly hours."

A tact, not at all belonging to the artist, came to him now with ready help.

"But Mr. Jelfrey is only just gone, as you acknowledge," he said, quietly; "I fear he missed me, and couldn't leave the colonel's message. Will you kindly tell me what it was?"

"I hope I'm better bred than to ask gentlemen to tell me things that no way concern me," answered Dorcas, with stately pride. "And if you missed the message, and it was a good one for you, you just deserved it; having visitors that daren't come in the daylight."

Looking at him with vicious scrutiny, Dorcas saw the scarlet rush into the artist's face, and she smiled with grim satisfaction.

"Mr. Jelfrey is a *gentleman*," she said, with impressive and suggestive emphasis; "and when he reached your door, and found that you were engaged with a *person*" (the second emphasis added greatly to the impressiveness and suggestiveness of the first), "he came in here to remain until your house should be visitable. Then, when he supposed you were alone again, he went in to give you Colonel Stuart's message. I wish you good-night now, and hope these doings under my own roof—for the houses are but too unfortunately conjoined—may not be allowed by Colonel Stuart to be of long continuance."

With this slow shot, Dorcas turned again for consolation to her tumbler of warm beverage, but its flavor was a little diluted by the unflattering consciousness that "that vagabond artist" had not waited to hear the whole of her speech.

Not he! By the time Dorcas had stopped to take breath, he was out in the lane, pursuing his way under the elms, with the sure, swift vigilance of a greyhound. No figure moved before him in the almost utter darkness; no step sounded on the hard road; but he still held on his hurried, eager way, until he saw before him the end of the lines of overarching elms; and, in the partial light beyond, two figures beside the green door in the wall which bounded the park of High Athelston.

It did not need the artist's keen, well-practiced eyes to recognize them. Eustace Jelfrey had one hand on Lina Chester's arm, while the other placed the key in the lock of the door.

With a very madness of anger, Fitz Spendir sprung forward, but only to see the door close behind them as they entered the park together. The gray, ivy-covered wall was eight or nine feet high, but Fitz looked up at it, eagerly and hungrily, as if he could have cleared it at a bound.

Lina had crossed the park, entered the house, and crept to her own room—the hunted look darkening her sad eyes then, even as it had never done before—when the artist at last left the dark lane, and, re-entering the cottage, sat down beside the empty grate, and took up the half-plucked bird.

CHAPTER XV.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN FORMS A RESOLUTION.

MARJORIE CASTILLAIN, in her pink evening dress, and with the roses unfaded in her rich brown hair, was sitting beside the fire in Miss Chester's bedroom when Lina entered it.

"I found Margaret here waiting to help you, Lina," she said, with only an instant's glance up from the fire, "so I told her you were downstairs, busy; and that, as I liked sitting here, she might go to bed. You *were* down-stairs, busy, so don't look shocked at me. It is no fib. You weren't upstairs, and you weren't idle. In that I was right, Miss Chester, as in most things—save the mark!"

Lina had smiled with sudden gladness when she saw Miss Castillain sitting in her room; but before she had taken off her hat, the short-lived brightness had vanished from her face, and it was pale with a pallor which frightened Marjorie. Yet Marjorie still spoke lightly, and still looked into the fire with idle enjoyment in her whole attitude; leaning forward on her low seat, and clasping both her hands round one knee.

"Margaret was glad enough to go back to the servants' hall, I know," she said, "for she idolizes the twin canaries. She is in love with one of them, but has not yet decided which, and she is equally fond of the other. You see, Lina, I think it one of the arduous duties of my sphere to make observations secretly about the *affaires du cœur* of the Athelston retainers. You've no idea how often my little romances turn out facts; and they—not the romances, but the heroes and heroines—need a little encouragement, which Lady Athelston is far too inert to give them. Poor lady! she forgets the time when for her 'we two' of the world were not exactly herself and her grown-up son. So, you see," continued Marjorie, still more easily, as Lina came toward the fire in her morning dress, "being so *au fait* in these matters, I understood exactly how Margaret would enjoy a little flirtation. Besides that, I understood how my dearly loved sister would enjoy a spicy gossip with our maid, sitting *en peignoir*, and growing happier and happier the more scandal Browne condensed into the time. Bah! isn't it an unwomanly thing—at least, I mean, isn't it a detestably womanly thing—to listen by the hour, with watering lips, while your servant tattles treachery about your own friends, lowering not only her and yourself, but lowering, too, all mistresses forever in the girl's eyes? And, besides that, I understood, Lina, how I myself should enjoy a quiet rest here until you came, and then a cheering talk with you, my little friend."

Marjorie had risen now, and was standing on the rug opposite Lina, her eyes unspeakably gentle and pitiful in their questioning.

"But—but I am so miserable!" cried Lina, impetuously, pushing her hair from her temples with the air of utter bewilderment which Marjorie had noticed before, and which it grieved

her inexpressibly to see, now that the white face was so full of helplessness and real despair.

"Have you failed?" asked Marjorie, in a whisper which sounded almost cheerful because she made such an effort to prevent its sounding hopeless.

"I—I have—more than failed; worse than failed."

"Then the letter is posted, Lina?"

"No," she answered, looking into Marjorie's eyes with a wide, startled gaze, "no; but Mr. Jelfrey has it."

"How was that?" asked Marjorie, letting no surprise appear either in her voice or eyes, for it really frightened her to see the terrible anguish on the face before her.

"I don't know yet," said Lina, very low, groping, as it were, in a great vacant darkness, and still gazing into Marjorie's eyes with the scared glance which seemed to search for some gleam of light to help her. "I left it in—the cottage; and before I reached here, he—overtook me, and—and he had the letter, he told me."

"But did not give it to you?" questioned Marjorie, still calmly, though the words sounded as if they came through her closed teeth.

"And I," continued Lina, as if she heard or saw nothing but that of which she was telling, "I forgot every thing and pleaded; but he would not—he would not, unless—"

"I see, dear," put in Marjorie, impulsively kissing the dark eyes which looked with such wild bewilderment into hers. "Don't look so, Lina. Let us talk of it quietly. Surely, surely we can frustrate *him*. Close your eyes; I can not bear their pain and fear. You mean," she went on, as she caressingly put Lina into the low chair and knelt upon the rug beside her, "you mean that he would not give it you unless you promised what he wished?"

"Yes," answered Lina, speaking sharply in her acute pain.

"And—don't be vexed with me, Lina, whatever I may ask—and is it impossible that you should do what he means?"

"I don't know. Oh! that is the hardest of all—*to know*," cried the girl, with a great tearless sob.

"I will not ask you," continued Marjorie, with her hands on the restless fingers clasped in Lina's lap, "why it would hurt you if that letter went. You told me this evening that you *feared* its going. That was enough for me to know then; that is enough for me to know now when I look into your eyes. It *would* hurt you if that letter went, and so we must prevent its going."

"Miss Castillain," whispered Lina, the words coming brokenly from her shaking lips, "it would not hurt me for the present only; it would wreck my whole life. Ah! you can never know what it is to be utterly alone in all the big, cold world; and how hard, being so, it is to earn a home. Oh, Miss Castillain, all my life would be wrecked, and—and—"

"I thought so," answered Marjorie, very softly. "It would wreck another life too. I read that in your face. Lina, you are sure my sister wrote it; not Mr. Jelfrey?"

"Lady Athelston told me Miss Castillain had 'kindly written' it for her," replied Lina, with slow unwillingness.

"Pooh!" cried Marjorie, with a ring of real contempt in her voice, "don't hesitate to tell of her to me. What a comfort that she did it kindly! At any rate, then, Lina, that letter must not go; and Mr. Jelfrey's conditions must not be met, whatever they are."

"But, Miss Castillain, I must tell you what they are," exclaimed Lina, still with the look of terrible suffering in her eyes. "Please let me tell you what they are, because I feel as if I groped so blindly, not knowing right from wrong; both are so terribly mixed."

Then Marjorie, seeing it would relieve and help the girl to tell even a little, said, with tenderness, just the words that Lina wanted,

"Yes, it will be better for you to tell me what he wants, dear; I," she added, "have known him so much longer than you have."

"No," interrupted Lina, with a quick catching of her breath. "But, Miss Castillain, how can I tell you what he said? You will hate me for repeating his words."

"No," returned Marjorie, earnestly; "never fear that any of his words can move me even to anger with *him*, let alone with you, dear. No, indeed, they can only make me despise him just a shade, perhaps, more heartily than I do now. Well, Lina, he says—?" she concluded, as a help to Lina in her reply.

"He said," breathed Lina, very low and slowly, "that he would not post that letter if I would promise to—to—would promise that Mr. Spendir should leave Highshire at once, quietly, without explanation to any one."

"I see—should leave suspiciously; yes, I see," assented Marjorie, her clear voice clearer than ever in its unutterable scorn; "should disappear—run away—yes, I see that distinctly. What else, Lina?"

"He said I must— Oh! I can not tell you!"

"I think I know," said Marjorie, gently. "It was about Sir Neil."

"Yes," answered Lina, her head drooping lower and lower, and her eyes, so dark in their sadness, wandering to the fire. "Oh, Miss Castillain, you can not know—you, of all the world!"

"It is just I of all the world who would be likely to know," returned Marjorie, calmly. "He wants you to give Sir Neil encouragement, as they call it. Don't flinch, dear; don't look so sadly shocked. I would never let words of Mr. Jelfrey's move me, if I were you. Lina, I've seen for a long time—for all this summer—that Sir Neil Athelston loves you. Don't interrupt me; the word is the right word, and I am the right one to tell you; at any rate," corrected Marjorie, with a great bravery in her shaking voice, "I choose to think so. Lina, I can see that Neil Athelston has never loved at all before this summer. I don't say what his love may be worth to any one; perhaps it too much depends on who the 'any one' is; but I know—and no one knows it as I know it—that he has never loved me as he loves you, and so I do him the justice to say that he can never have loved *any one* as he loves you. I know it; I can see it in his face always now; I can hear it in every tone of his voice when you are present. You see, I don't flinch from telling it; but that is nothing. The simple fact stands as I have said, and Eustace Jelfrey sees it. Lina, in spite of the abhorrence I see in your face for this subject, in

spite of your strong and natural dislike to Sir Neil Athelston, I have made you listen to this to prove to you that I understand that condition of Eustace Jelfrey's; and I know he will abide by it. I know he will hold to it like grim death."

"Why?" asked Lina, the vacant, wandering gaze once more fixed upon Marjorie.

"Why!" echoed Marjorie, speaking so lightly that no sign was visible of the scorn and contempt she felt. "Because Neil wants but the slightest encouragement from you to violate unhesitatingly the tie between himself and me, and that tie Eustace Jelfrey would use all his strength and skill to break at any cost."

A little light of comprehension broke upon Lina's face.

"I knew he admired you," she said, trying to understand; "but I thought he was—was going to ask your sister to marry him."

"Of course you did, and so he is," laughed Marjorie, "but only if his last scheme fails. This is his last scheme, and it must fail. We will frustrate both Mr. Jelfrey's conditions. You shall not persuade Mr. Spendir to leave Highshire; nor shall you let Sir Neil think that you love him, you poor little lonely girl!"

And Marjorie Castillain, in her large and generous sympathy, took the aching head within her arms, and actually shed warm tears above it.

"It is no wonder that I should try to help you, is it, Lina," she whispered, soothingly, "when I am the cause of the persecution you suffer?"

"Oh! indeed—indeed, you are not!" cried Lina, earnestly. "You say it because you are so good, but you don't know, and I can not tell you. Oh, Miss Castillain, what must you think of me?"

"Too much to tell you what it is," replied Marjorie, with ineffable gentleness.

"And you never ask me," Lina went on, sobbing, "you never ask me how I could get Mr. Spendir to go away from here; you never ask me what I know of him, what influence I have over him; you never suspect—"

"Never," returned Marjorie, hastily. "I trust you, Lina, because I could not help it if I tried. I can do nothing but trust you, dear. And as for him, does not Colonel Stuart trust him just as fully as I trust you? Doesn't he trust him because he knows him? And, knowing him, it seems natural to trust and to like him. Well, it is just as natural to me to trust and to like you. If you never tell me a word more than you have told me to-night I shall still have utter confidence in you, my little friend."

Then, still within Marjorie's warm and pitiful embrace, the girl—who could not even then tell the secret of her life—wept long and unrestrainedly; sobbing until the excited strength of the slight frame gave way. Marjorie let her weep and sob, only holding her close, and whispering soothing words now and then. And when she was exhausted—yet relieved, and Marjorie knew it—she told her it was bed-time; and moving softly about the room, in her beautiful flowing dress, and talking now quite easily and naturally, she brought at last one little gleam of hope to the white face which lay so wearily upon the cushion.

"Good-night," she whispered, bending until the roses in her hair touched Lina's eyelashes, and their perfume brought a momentary, inexplicable gladness thrilling through her, as the sudden scent of flowers often will. "Good-night. Don't think of this again until to-morrow, and then it will all look clearer and brighter, dear."

Hardly speaking, or accepting any help, when she went to her room, Marjorie waited until her sister had dismissed the maid (a right she always reserved to herself), arranged her pillows, and lain down. Then Marjorie came up to the bed, and, leaning with folded arms upon the carved foot-rail, looked at her sister with a pleading wistfulness which was new and strange on the gay, careless face.

Louisa was the beauty of the family—there never was any question about that—but never at her best had she looked beautiful just as Marjorie did then.

"Louie," she began, "I very seldom ask you to do me a favor—a particular, personal favor, do I?"

"Quite often enough, I think," replied Louisa, languidly.

"Will you grant me one to-night?" continued Marjorie, unheeding this interruption. "It will not hurt you. Indeed, in years to come you may thank me in your heart because you were persuaded to do it."

"Indeed!" interrupted Louisa, icily. "Perhaps I had better thank you now. I may have forgotten it in years to come."

"It will cost you no trouble, no loss, no self-denial even. Oh, Louisa, do say you will do it!"

"I'm not quite idiot enough to promise before I know what it is," returned Miss Castillain. "Speak out, if you want any thing, and make haste. Money, of course!"

"No," answered the younger sister, gently. "I may want money—I generally do—but I would not ask you for *that* as I ask you for this."

"Well, what is it, then?"

But Marjorie hesitated even yet to speak out, understanding her sister so well. So—though in her great earnestness it would have relieved her to come to the point at once—she leaned a little more forward on her arms, and slowly introduced her desired request, as she fancied it would be best received.

"We all know," she said, "what an immense power you possess over Eustace Jelfrey. He obeys every wish of yours, much to Emily Jorden's discomfiture; and he is always ready to follow your advice. Louie, will you use this great influence, which every body notices, to dissuade him from posting a letter which Lady Athelston has written to-day to London about Miss Chester?"

Marjorie, knowing who was the real writer of the letter, had too much tact and knowledge of her sister to venture to let such a knowledge appear, or to seem to suspect that Louisa could have even the smallest share in the transaction, except as an able auxiliary now in remedying the evil.

"Rubbish!" sneered Miss Castillain from her pillow, looking, with a supercilious smile, into her sister's anxious face, on which the fluctuating color came and went swiftly in this, to her, novel and unpleasant situation. "What business is it of mine what Lady Athelston may choose to do about her poor little paltry companion? We have quite enough of her down-stairs, I think,

without your dragging her into every conversation up here. I'm sick to death of her very name."

"If you will promise me this one thing," entreated Marjorie, "I will promise never to speak to you of her again—I will, indeed."

"Much I should believe you! Besides," added Miss Castillain, with an enjoyment of her sister's unusual and unfeigned earnestness, "would not it relieve you from your present painful position to know that the letter had been posted? Don't people generally post their letters the day they write them?"

"But I know—I mean," corrected Marjorie, with great suddenness, "sometimes Lady Athelston does not; and, if it is not posted — will you promise me it shall not go if it is not posted? I will take the other chance. Oh, Louisa! do promise me; you might just as well. Will you?"

"Might I just as well?" snapped the elder sister. "That is not exactly what I happen to think. The letter is posted; rest content with that. If it were not—"

"If it is not," cried Marjorie, the tears actually starting in her pleading eagerness, "you will prevent its being done? Louie, there isn't any thing you can ask me that I will not do for you, if you will only promise me this."

"Thank you, but I have no special desire either for your property or services," rejoined Miss Castillain, chillingly; "and I have not the faintest intention of doing what you ask. I hope I am too much of a lady—whatever you may be—to interfere in matters that are entirely personal and private matters of Lady Athelston's."

"But if Eustace Jelfrey isn't too much of a gentleman—I mean," faltered Marjorie, afraid of injuring her cause by her natural impetuosity, "if Eustace Jelfrey doesn't think it wrong to interfere, you need not, need you, Louisa? I shouldn't; I shouldn't, indeed," cried the girl, forgetting in her eagerness how little store Louisa ever set by her opinion on any point. "And you could do it so well. Will you?—will you? I ask you a favor so seldom, and I ask you this so urgently. Will you—if Eustace Jelfrey has the letter—prevent its being posted to-morrow?"

"On the contrary," replied Louisa, gazing with stony unconcern into her sister's face, "if you do tempt me to interfere at all in this affair, I shall do it just so far as to take especial care that Lady Athelston's letter *is* posted to-morrow, without fail; and posted in a way which it will be rather hard to circumvent. But I think," she added, watching with a keen enjoyment the very novel sight of her sister's patient forbearance, "I think, my dear, that you have no real cause to excite or distress yourself over such a trifle, as I am perfectly confident that the letter would be posted promptly and safely if it were left in Eustace Jelfrey's care. Does not that satisfy you?"

Marjorie, wondering vaguely, as she listened to this last speech, how far Louisa's deceit could go, but hardly knowing even that she thought of it, pleaded again with one last, brave struggle.

"Louie, you may be glad afterward if you promise me. You never can be glad that you refused. Do promise me! I will do any thing for you, and I will never say a word of this."

"Thank you; that is indeed kind," retorted Miss Castillain, with vicious suavity. "I should value your offer highly if I were accustomed to doing things about which I could fear your 'saying a word.' No, I have not yet fallen quite so low as that, whatever my sister may have done. Are you going to bed at all to-night, or are you going to lean there staring at me till morning?"

"Does it strike you, Louisa," asked Marjorie, a great, cold change coming over all her face, "that Neil Athelston would hardly relish the fact of Mrs. Esdaile's tutor posting his mother's letters, when the post-bags go from here; and that I may choose to tell him of it?"

"It is not very likely that you will," laughed Miss Castillain, in her thorough cruel confidence, "at least not if you do really care what becomes of that upstart girl. That would, of course, at once prove to Neil that she was an impostor, and he would soon turn her away then."

"Would he?" echoed Marjorie, ironically, but knowing, even better than her sister did, how little wisdom there would be in that plan she had hinted of. "I don't quite know whether he wouldn't turn you away first. Go to sleep; blessed and consolatory dreams no doubt await you; they always wait on innocence and purity and love. I dare say there are several now attending the couch of that masculine angel, Eustace. Oh, what a beautiful couple you and he will make—in a photograph! In real life," added the girl, musingly, as she twisted up her long brown hair, "I don't know but what I should be all the happier at a good wholesome distance from such a pair. I think I should be the gainer in purity of atmosphere."

"Don't you think," put in Louisa, with a calm enjoyment of the spite her speech contained, "that you are just a little bit idiotic to make this fuss about one of Lady Athelston's dependents until you are mistress of Lady Athelston's house? And don't you think, too, that your chance of becoming Lady Athelston yourself is rather slight while that low-bred girl stays here? It is plain to see that she could lure that foolish Neil to any thing. I advise you to show a grain or two of common sense in this matter, if you really *have* any to show. I, as your elder sister, advise you not to stand quite so thoroughly in your own light."

"And I advise you," cried Marjorie, in a voice of intense passion, while the big brown eyes flamed with anger under the hands which were still in her hair, "to remember that you are not speaking to such a one as your own contemptible, false-hearted self. And I advise you to remember that Neil Athelston is no fool; if he had been, he would have been lured, as you call it, to propose to you years ago, when you used every art you possess to tempt him. And I advise you to think, before you call Miss Chester low-bred, that she may rank miles above you presently—I hope she will. And I believe her birth has been as good as yours; and I know, and every body can see, that her words and acts are better than yours, even at your best. And as for her beauty, that is as far above yours as—as—"

Poor Marjorie faltered and failed lamely over her simile, for the natural and uncontrollable burst of passion had exhausted itself, and she felt the hot tears crowding to her eyes, as they always would after one of these rare, real outbreaks with her sister; real, because the girl's very heart was tempest-tossed with a fierce,

shamed misery; rare, because, as long as she had strength to curb the anger and hurt pride that burned within her, Marjorie avoided any retaliation upon her sister beyond the honest, hot rebuff, which was over in a few seconds, and left her comfortable and content.

So much stronger and higher in heart and mind was she than her sister, that it was but seldom she felt crushed, as she did now, by the malicious words and spiteful hints. Besides this, she was baffled and disappointed, too, of her desire, and knew she should have no comfort to give on the morrow, where she felt that comfort was sorely needed; so it was not wonderful that her hot, vehement speech was unfinished, and the scalding tears would have their way.

Louisa, catching sight of them, laughed pleasantly upon her pillow.

"Get into bed, Marjorie," she remarked, with amiable patronage, "and don't be such an arrant goose."

Marjorie did not retaliate then, though her eyes flashed through her tears. She extinguished the lights, and, drawing the heavy curtains from a narrow, deep-set window which had no shutters, looked out across the park, where she could but dimly descry the outlines of the great trees and the gigantic hills above and beyond. And, standing so, she wondered and wondered many things, though never for a moment, in her brave and simple confidence, did she doubt the truth and purity of the girl she was befriending.

"There is one effort I can make," she said to herself at last. "If that does not succeed, I—I suppose I must appeal to him. What a horrible lowering of my pride that will be! Yet I don't know," she mused, with a gleam of the old brightness—almost the old merriment—in her eyes; "nothing really lowers us but sin, so old nurses tell us, and sometimes they hit upon the truth, as Solomon did. I hope that's true, for to beg a favor of Eustace Jelfrey will be as bad to me as the Inquisition."

And, with this lucid simile and cheering thought, Marjorie turned away from the gloom and the chilly silence which that night surrounded High Athelston.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHERE THE LETTER WENT.

Mr. Johnson Mathers, stationer and postmaster of Churchill, sat writing at his desk, on the afternoon succeeding Lina Chester's night walk to the village post-office. It was by no means an unusual thing for Mr. Mathers to be seated at his desk, but it *was* an unusual thing for him to be entering three new books to the account of Miss Marjorie Castillain, of Hawkedale.

"The old gentleman doesn't allow her more than just what she's bound to spend on her dress." So said Churchill, and the *vox populi* was never nearer the truth.

"It is odd," ruminated Mr. Mathers, "that I should have chanced to lay those very books out on the counter before she came in that day, and that she should have remembered afterward that they were the books she wanted. It was a good chance hit of mine." And Mr. Mathers finished entering the order with complacency, knowing, of course, nothing about Marjorie's motives, or of how she had had to ransack her brain to recollect what books they were which she had noticed in the shop.

Mr. Johnson Mathers looked up from his desk as a lady came through the open glass door, then acknowledged the presence of Miss Marjorie Castillain with a bow.

The postmaster of Churchill was no sycophant; but with this little bow of his he always distinguished his county customers from those whom he could freely designate (as he often did in his letters to the local paper) as his "fellow-townsmen." He was a man who had read a good deal and thought a good deal, and upon that basis formed very radical opinions. Yet, for all that, he was never known to omit the deferential bow which he specially awarded to his county patrons.

"Your parcel, Miss Castillain, will be sent up at once—to High Athelston, I presume?"

"No," said Marjorie, a little perceptible hesitation in her pleasant voice, "I think I should like it sent home. We shall soon be returning to Hawkedale. But I did not come in now about that; I knew that would be all right. The fact is, I have just made a great mistake, and I want you to assist me in rectifying it."

Mr. Johnson Mather's spirits rose a little. Here was the nicest young lady in the county come to him for assistance, and *she* could never ask him any thing to which it would be against his principles to agree.

"I posted a letter in this office an hour ago, which I want to stop," said Marjorie, hastening on with her words. "The fact is, circumstances have arisen, since then, to make it of the utmost importance to me that the letter should not go. Mr. Mathers, will you give it back to me?"

Poor Marjorie! She thought that when once she had uttered the falsehood and the request, her greatest difficulty would be over. Surely the postmaster, though he might suspect her, would give her the letter. But she was to be grievously disappointed; the longing brown eyes read a calm and determined negative in his face.

"I am very sorry, Miss Castillain," he said, and there was a real regret in his tones, "but such a thing is impossible. I can not return a letter that has once been posted. I dare not, however much I might wish it."

"Dare not!" echoed Marjorie, in her ignorance. "Oh! but it's my own letter, and I want it back. No one else will know—no one else shall *ever* know—so no one can blame you for it."

"But you do not understand, Miss Castillain," returned the postmaster. "I am bound by an oath in my position here. I should be glad to do it for *you*, if I could do it for any one."

"But surely you could do that," pleaded Miss Castillain, with an earnestness which the Churchhill postmaster had never seen before in her merry eyes. "Just think what a little thing it is that I ask! Circumstances have arisen which make the posting of that letter a great mistake; and why may I not stop it, and prevent this mistake, which can not be corrected afterward, try as we may? Suppose I had burned it when I had first written it; no one would have done wrong, no one would have been to blame. Now, just because I—I have slipped it into your letter-

box, is it to be as entirely out of my reach as if it had never been mine? Does that make it a crime for me to retain it? Do give me the letter, Mr. Mathers!" the girl broke off, with quick entreaty.

"There are other ways of looking at the case, Miss Castillain," the postmaster said, very regretfully, but still with the quiet determination which said so much for the impracticability of the thing. "As I said, I am bound by an oath, and I can not do this if I would. But for that, indeed, I would. You should not have to ask me twice. As it is, I can not."

Looking into Miss Castillain's wistful eyes, Mr. Johnson Mathers saw them slowly fill with tears, which, without falling, clung to the long, dark lashes. Not only had he never seen them so before—few ever had—but he had not even imagined that the laughing eyes, which were so well known in Churchill, could soften with wistful, disappointed tears. He looked sideways out of his window. Strong and firm as his principles were, he felt it wiser not to meet those puzzled, persuasive eyes.

"Mr. Mathers, I think even the postmaster-general would not object to my having my letter back," she said, gently. "He couldn't, if he knew how much depended on it."

"I wish he had the question asked him instead of myself," was the somewhat unsteady answer, as Johnson Mathers still looked from the window, and wondered why his heart should beat so much more quickly when he tried to fancy what this girl's gratitude would be like.

"He would consent, I am sure," she put in, with anxious haste. "I will ask him some time if he could refuse—for I know him well. Or," she corrected herself, in her nervous anxiety, "or I will never speak of it. If you will do it, I will never tell."

"But that makes no difference, indeed, Miss Castillain," Mr. Mathers answered, turning with an effort once more to meet the pleading gaze. "I can not break my oath."

"Is there no way?" asked Marjorie, after a long, thoughtful pause. "Is there no way in which you can kindly oblige me?"

The postmaster folded the blotting-paper that lay on the counter, slowly and deliberately, his eyes fixed upon it; partly because to look up shattered his strong and steadfast resolution, partly because the thought he followed was engrossing him. When he did look up at last, Miss Castillain saw a change in his whole face; and she fancied then that, in spite of his apparent immovability, he had been really hurt to refuse her.

"Miss Castillain, to whom is your letter addressed?"

The answer came from her lips in a whisper, as if she feared that the very books had ears to hear.

"To Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square, London, W."

"And you wish that it should not reach London?"

"I do, indeed. I am very anxious."

The brilliant eyes, in their sudden flash of hope, were not hard to meet now. Mr. Mathers thought, with his quiet smile, that it was very pleasant to feel them fixed upon himself.

"You wish to keep the letter in your own possession, Miss Castillain?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I will do what shall insure its reaching your hands, and afterward you can treat it as you will. I hope no one else will ever make this request to me, but I will do it now. Will you address this envelope to yourself, while I look for the letter? 'Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square.'"

As he repeated the address, he placed a large-sized envelope on the blotting-paper before Marjorie, and passed her the pen and ink. Just as she was writing her own name (and Mr. Mathers, beyond the opposite counter, was opening the letter-box), a gay, talkative party entered the shop. Marjorie heard the steps behind her, and coolly placed the blotting-paper over the envelope, rising slowly from her chair, and addressing the rector of Churchill in just as cool and gay a tone as if her heart had not been beating heavily with fear.

With the rector came his daughter, and Eustace Jelfrey, with little Jack Esdaile. Marjorie turned and spoke, and shook hands with each, though she would not stir from that spot, nor remove her one hand from the blotting-paper. By the time Mr. Jorden needed the services of the master of the shop, those services were at his disposal. Mr. Mathers was as far as possible from the letter-box, coolly packing the books for Miss Castillain.

"Are you coming our way, Miss Marjorie?" asked the rector, when their business was over, while Jelfrey awaited her answer with subdued eagerness.

"Not yet, Mr. Jorden. I have promised to wait here until the carriage passes to High Athelston. I had two or three errands to do in the town, but I can not walk any farther. I am quite tired now."

"You are still staying at High Athelston?" inquired Mr. Jorden.

"Yes. We shall be there a few days longer. So you did return to your duties this morning, Mr. Jelfrey, after all?"

Bright and quizzical was her glance at Jelfrey; and he answered gayly, knowing so little what had brought her there.

"I felt that my leave had expired. I would not on any account abuse Mrs. Esdaile's lenity, though Sir Neil Athelston was good enough to persuade me (and Colonel Stuart seconded him) to stay as long as his other guests."

"Sir Neil is always hospitable," remarked Marjorie, lightly. "Good-bye, Emily. I'm sorry I can not walk with you."

But Emily Jorden was not sorry at all, and Marjorie smiled as she read this fact, and watched Miss Jorden walking away gladly at Eustace Jelfrey's side.

"Now," said Marjorie to herself, drawing a great breath of relief when they were gone, "now it will be all right."

When she turned in from the door, the postmaster had gone again to the letter-box. Though he was only a small shop-keeper in a small town, he was too courteous to be standing near her, after having overheard the excuses she had uttered. She finished the address on the envelope, writing with intense care, in fine, pointed letters, exactly as her sister would have done.

"Is this it, Miss Castillain?" asked Mr. Mathers, holding Louisa's letter toward her, and crit-

ically comparing the handwriting of the two addresses.

"That is it," she answered, with a catch in her voice, as she saw him examine the writing.

He put the letter, without another word, into the large envelope she had addressed to herself; then he stamped it, and replaced it in the letter-box.

"Now, Miss Castillain," he said, evidently glad to have pleased her, yet as evidently not quite free from self-blame, "you will receive that letter by to-morrow morning's post, and will, of course, do what you like with it. I have not let it out of my hands, but I am glad to say I have been able to accommodate you. Your parcel shall be sent up at once," he added, with quick tact, "for I see the boy now coming down the street."

But though he had said this to set her at ease, he knew that he would not for any thing have missed her few earnest words of thanks. The boy came in, and was dispatched at once (and rather demonstratively) to Hawkedale, with Miss Castillain's books; and Miss Castillain herself sauntered to the door, and gazed down the steep street. But she had done this several times before she saw the beautiful bays, in their dazzling harness, trotting in from High Athelston, Neil himself driving them, and Ridley, with folded arms, beside him.

Mr. Mathers came out to assist Miss Castillain to her seat, and she thanked him with one of her bright, quick smiles. But Colonel Stuart had left his place at the back of the long, luxurious wagonette, and there was no need of other help for Marjorie. Ridley closed the door behind them; Lonisa significantly moved aside her dress to let her sister pass; Neil looked round from his high seat, and asked, "All right?" Marjorie nodded up at him from the seat which she had been forced to take, and then the bays went stepping on daintily up the street and out into the London road.

"What an odd coincidence!" ruminated Mr. Johnson Mathers, as he turned back into his shop. "I'm glad to have been able to do it for her in some sort of manner, but I don't suppose there's any one else in the county for whom I could have done it. And that's not because she's going to be Lady Athelston of High Athelston, for it's not for my lady or Sir Neil that I would have done what I've done to-day. And she wasn't ashamed of thanking me there before them all just as she would have thanked any one of them. She's always that way. If she had been so only just because I had done what she asked me to do, I'd not have thought of it one second, or valued it one grain; but she's always so; being, I take it, a lady in her heart, apart from her money and her position, and all that. She little thinks how that kindliness and pleasantness which come natural to her have returned to her to-day in this favor which she begged of me. I'm glad," continued the postmaster, philosophically, "that she does *not* know. It comes straight from the goodness of her heart, and it's pleasant to think she imagines that whatever we do for her comes straight from the goodness of *ours*."

Next morning, with very skillful haste, Marjorie put into her pocket unopened the one letter which the High Athelston post-bag contained for her, and after breakfast started alone across the park. She had promised to meet Lina Chester near the cottages in Nether Lane, but, before she reached them, Eustace Jelfrey, riding with his pupil, overtook her.

"Is not this a beautiful autumn day, Miss Marjorie?" he said, dismounting with prompt courtesy, and speaking in his softest tones, as he walked on beside her.

"Why, Jack," she exclaimed, only acknowledging Mr. Jelfrey's greeting with a cold smile, "you have perpetual holidays, I think! Where are you going now?"

"Home—to lessons, unfortunately," answered the boy. "Come with us, Marjorie, and make them jolly."

"They will be sure to be jolly, in any case, Jack," she said, with a side-glance at the tutor. "How many hours have you studied already to-day?"

"Oh, two or three; quite enough, I think, for the whole day; but Mr. Jelfrey is so dreadfully strict about studies when he is at it."

"Quite natural, too," assented Marjorie, "seeing how very often he is *not* at it."

"Those holidays which the boy enjoys so much," said Jelfrey, in a low, plausible tone, "are valueless to me, Miss Castillain. The only thing that could make leisure enjoyable for me no leisure gives me."

"Do you not enjoy any of the occupations of your leisure time?" asked Marjorie, looking fully and calmly into his face; "not even those occupations which make your leisure so fortunate for others?"

"I do not understand you," said Jelfrey, his voice quite calm, though the scarlet mounted slowly to his very hair.

"I think you do," she returned, in the slow, grave voice which always baffled him, because he never understood whether it was fun or sarcasm, "I think you do. Jack," she continued, turning gayly to the boy, and laying her hand on his pony's neck, "ride on now, fast. I want to come slowly, and enjoy to the very fullest the beauty of this wonderful day. Good-bye."

And when she had succeeded in dismissing them, Marjorie laughed low and clearly, as she lingered behind among the flickering sunbeams and soothing shadows, a great enjoyment shining in the depths of her bright eyes.

"Discomfited!" she said to herself merrily, "decidedly discomfited; and such a result is worthy my greatest efforts."

Then Marjorie, still with the laughter on her lips and in her eyes, sat down upon the hedge-bank and waited for Lina, while the brown leaves fell upon her from the elms above.

When Lina came into sight, Miss Castillain rose at once and joined her, talking bright little commonplaces as they walked on together under the autumn trees.

"Lina," she said, easily and coolly, as they came in sight of the two white cottages, "I have the letter for you. Here it is. I have had no trouble about it; don't imagine that I have. It was all quite easy, and so you need not ask me any thing about it, for it is not worth telling of."

Not only did Marjorie, in her simple, deep generosity, make thus light of her own act, but so amusedly, yet so gently did she receive Lina's broken thanks, that somehow it ended for them both in a cheery little laugh. Yet for all that,

Marjorie's trusting confidence in acting thus, and her bright, delicate tact in treating her own part so lightly and Lina's part so openly, went deep down into the heart of the lonely girl, and stirred its very depths with a gratitude which nothing had ever roused before through all her life.

"You are going in to speak to Mr. Spendir, aren't you?" inquired Miss Castillain, as she hesitated at the gate of Mrs. Cheere's cottage. "How long do you think you shall be? I will time my visit to Dorcas accordingly. We may just as well walk back together as separately; mayn't we?"

"I shall only be a few minutes, Miss Castillain," answered Lina, nervously, knowing that Marjorie had decided to call upon Dorcas only to make her feel at liberty to go next door, and really almost bewildered in her gratitude.

"I need not stay longer than half an hour," said Miss Castillain. "If that will suit you, you will be here again in that time?"

"Yes; thank you."

Marjorie smiled at the thanks, but her face was sad and pitiful, too, when she entered Mrs. Cheere's neat and stiff little parlor.

A very dull call it was, accompanied by complaints in every key; and it was more in the hope of a change than from any desire to obtain information that Marjorie turned the conversation at last to the artist and his boy.

"I don't understand any thing about their goings-on," remarked Dorcas, her head at a stately elevation. "They seem to be as poor as they can be, and yet, all the time, they sing as if the world was their own."

"Do they?" asked Marjorie, absently, wondering whether the grievance to Dorcas was their poverty, or their singing in defiance of it.

"Do they? Indeed they do," she echoed, with scornful emphasis; "and when they are not singing they are up to other spurtlements—laughing, or playing games, or whatever they call it."

"What should you call it, Mrs. Cheere?" inquired the girl, deferentially, hoping her question would elicit another unusual term.

"I call it disturbing a peaceable neighbor," retorted Dorcas; "that's what I call it, Miss Castillain. I know I and my little girl never made such noises, and there never are such noises in my house."

"Are they never still, then, next door?"

"Hardly to say ever quite still," explained Dorcas. "If the father's working, the child's reading aloud by the hour, or telling him stories, or playing fiddles; or they're both whistling, or—oh, it's always something or other, and then they have such odd visitors."

"Have they? And no visitors that are not odd?" asked Marjorie, an inexplicable blush rising as she spoke.

"Too many, I should think, considering what a barn it is to ask respectable people into," answered Dorcas, with a relish. "There's the colonel comes often and often, and stays long enough too, I should think, when there isn't a comfortable chair, so to be called, in the place."

"Yes?" questioned Marjorie, rousing herself, after the pause which followed Mrs. Cheere's words.

"Oh, plenty more, Miss Castillain, though I can't be expected to say what sort. Lady Athelston's companion, as they call her—though I wonder my lady likes to be a companion of *hers*—she comes now and then in a sly, dark way. I can't bear to see it—I, a respectable woman! If I'd thought my little girl would do such a thing—"

"As call to see Mr. Spendir in the dusk, you mean?" asked Marjorie, gently, as the woman paused to wipe her eyes.

"I don't like her," put in Dorcas, with unexpected vigor; "I never liked her. She always looked too ladyfied for her place. But I've liked her less since I've seen her come to speak to that man next door" (it was rarely that Dorcas condescended to give the artist any other designation), "when quiet, orderly folks were in their own rooms."

"I would do it any day, Mrs. Cheere, and never think harm of it, either," put in Marjorie, audaciously. "Does he have other visitors, did you say?"

"I've seen the tutor from The Anchorage go in at the gate," rejoined Dorcas, rather stonily; "and he's been sitting in here before now, waiting for the man to come in."

"In here?" ejaculated Miss Castillain, now really astonished.

"Yes, in here, Miss Castillain; rather pleasanter, I should think, it was for him, too, than in that place. Thank goodness, I *have* got chairs that I can ask you and him and such-like to sit on, without feeling ashamed of myself."

"I hear Miss Chester's voice now, I think," said Marjorie, gently, as she rose. "She has been in next door, and I should like to catch her, that we may walk home together. Good-bye. You will see me to-morrow with the paper."

Hardly could Dorcas articulate her good-bye, so surprised and puzzled was she by the fact of Miss Castillain not only countenancing the visits of Lady Athelston's companion to that man next door, but actually joining her afterward, anxious to walk back with her.

Standing at the window, but out of sight, Dorcas gazed eagerly upon the meeting of the two girls; and her breath quickened to a dangerous degree when she saw that "that man" was there too, and that Miss Castillain's first act, when she joined them, was to give him her hand with a smile which made her look beautiful even to the gloomy, prejudiced eyes of the solitary and imbittered woman who looked surreptitiously on the scene.

"Mr. Spendir," Marjorie said, feeling the color rise and the tears start as she met the look of strange, quiet earnestness which beautified the artist's face while he stood out there in the sunshine, "I've had my usual shindy with Dorcas—I mean I've had an engagement with Dorcas, as usual. I can not think how you escape. I thought every body who came near her had to join in a continual skirmish. And I understand that you always get the worst of it, unless you show an enormous amount of pluck—I mean a great amount of energy; and defy her—defy her to the death! I hope you do that?"

"*You* do not, Miss Castillain," Fitz said, not understanding that her speech was uttered only as a hint to him that he must do so if he wanted any peace.

"Oh, I do," laughed Marjorie, "only I like first to listen to her. She teaches me one or

two new words every time I hear her. It's as good as a play. Isn't it what King Charles said of Parliament discussing the Divorce Bill? Now, Lina, shall we walk back together?"

"I am ready," said Lina, looking brighter than she had looked for many days. And then Marjorie shook hands with the artist, a strange inexplicable comfort for him in her voice and face and hand-shake.

"Miss Castillain," began Lina, as they went slowly along the shadowy lane, "I seem to want to tell you many things, and yet—I can not."

"Don't try," returned Marjorie, tersely.

"I know I can never repay you in any way," said Lina, with a sob in her voice.

"Oh, what joyful tidings!" cried Marjorie, laughingly. "You couldn't have told me any thing more to your own credit, Lina—not any thing. Don't you know how 'base is the slave that pays?'"

And then they walked on merrily, talking of other things; while Fitz went slowly back into the empty house, and, standing before the fire, watched the burning into ashes of a square, unopened letter, with the arms of the Athelstons in vermilion on the seal.

He watched the faint and feathery ashes disperse and die; then, with a long-drawn sigh, breathed unconsciously, he sat down to his drawing, softly singing the last verse of "Tom Bowling"—softly singing it again and again, as if that, too, came from his lips unconsciously.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAFFLED.

SEPTEMBER and October had passed. Lady Athelston, once or twice during the two months, had questioned Lina about the lady with whom she had lived in Berkeley Square, but had never, to Lina herself, expressed any surprise at her letter remaining unanswered. By no one else was it ever mentioned. So the life of those autumn months was undisturbed, and a light-hearted girl would have forgotten that she had been upon the brink of a precipice from which she recoiled with such a fear and trembling. But Lina Chester was not a light-hearted girl, and there ever seemed to hover over her a shadow, "faint yet pursuing."

There is no need to go back and tell how these two months had passed; let the sequel show it.

The early breakfast-bell at Hawkedale had clanged through the house half an hour ago, yet still Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were taking the meal alone in that dingy breakfast-room, from which the chill was hardly banished by the small fire burning in the grate.

"What time did you get home last night, or, rather, this morning?" inquired the squire, looking up sharply from his primitive rasher.

"We left High Athelston soon after one, papa. The party broke up at midnight, but you know that Lady Athelston and Neil always like us to wait as long as we can."

"Stupid things, these perpetual parties they keep up," grumbled the squire: "stupid and extravagant."

"We need not go if you disapprove of them, papa," rejoined his daughter, dutifully. "Marjorie enjoys them so much that I go for her sake; but perhaps, if you forbid her, she will listen to you. Of course, I have no power over her."

"Let her alone," returned Mr. Castillain, all the more pettishly as he knew his daughter understood how little this proceeding would suit his tactics. "But I can not have this idleness encouraged in the house. I declare she shall have no breakfast at all, unless she can be down at the proper hour."

"I am forever reminding her, and begging her to be in time," observed Louisa, plaintively, "but it's no use. Being an hour or two later at night never makes any difference to me."

"Because you're a sensible girl," remarked the old squire, eying his daughter proudly, and feeling what a true Castillain she was.

"A very sensible girl," assented Marjorie, entering the room at that moment; "I wish she wasn't."

"I'll tell you what *I* wish," snapped her father, "and that is, that you would be ready for your meals when your meals are ready for you."

"Not on the morning after a fearfully late dinner-party," said Marjorie, coolly, as she took her seat. "I hate the morning after a party, and I curtail it as much as possible. I think it altogether a mistake to get up until the next day but one."

"Whatever makes you look so queer, Marjorie?" drawled her sister. "You look as if you had been crying all night. Had you any mortification at High Athelston, through that companion of Lady Athelston's?"

If Louisa Castillain *could* have been made to feel ashamed of herself, she would most likely have felt it when her sister's eyes met hers after this speech; but such a feeling was impossible to her, and the strange, questioning look on Marjorie's face—so unusually pale this morning—drew from her just a hard little laugh, and nothing more.

Then Marjorie—half in hurt defiance, and half in the effort to hide that her eyes were swollen and her lips unsteady—talked on coolly, as she always could when she was most restless and most pained.

"Papa, when shall you give a return ball to the Athelstons? You see we have been there so often lately, and their ball is this day week—the day of your clothing-club tea, Louie. What two blessed ordinances to fall on one day! We must have a grand ball in return, papa; when shall it be?"

The squire's sharp and conclusive "never" was only just the answer which Marjorie had expected. But she raised her eyebrows with as much astonishment as if she had had a deeper motive in the conversation than the desire to distract him, and to amuse herself.

"Christmas would be the best time for us to have it," she resumed, idly, as she buttered a finger of toast; "but we can think of it presently. In the mean time, I must have a little money, please. I can not go to the High Athelston ball without a new dress."

"Rubbish!" sneered the squire. "You've dresses enough, I should think."

"But you think incorrectly," rejoined Marjorie, placidly; "I've nothing fit to wear."

"You ought to be ashamed to say it," an-

swered her father, pushing back his chair angrily. "You have your allowance, and you must make it do. What did I tell you last year, when your expenses went beyond your income?"

"It wasn't so much that my expenses went beyond my income," she returned, calmly glancing at him as she held her tea-cup in her hand, "as that my income failed to cover my expenses."

For a moment the squire drew in his lips to curb a laugh, but his next question was captious enough.

"And what did I tell you then, I say?"

"You said it must never occur again. I therefore wish to give you an early opportunity of preventing it, sir."

"You may depend on this, Marjorie: what you have is all you will have, until you are married, and can look to some one else to encourage your extravagance."

"But, my dear sir," spoke Marjorie, looking into her father's face with comic gravity, "you will never get us off your hands if we go out into society ugly and shabby."

"Pray don't talk of 'us,'" put in Miss Castillain; "I can make my income suffice, and always look well."

"Oh, model daughter of a model parent!" cried Marjorie, with eyes uplifted.

"As long as your sister dresses uncomplainingly on her allowance, I can not think how you dare grumble," cried Mr. Castillain, hotly.

"Louie saves such a lot out of the household expenses," said Marjorie, quietly, her eyes and thoughts apparently engrossed by the egg she was breaking.

For the first time the color rushed into Louisa's face—the angry, resentful color. "Such a suspicion is like you, Marjorie," she stammered.

"Very like me," assented Marjorie, promptly, "and the act is very like you. Papa, can't you give me something that shall be equivalent to Louisa's scrapings out of the housekeeping? It is worth quite a hundred a year to her."

Louisa Castillain was not often taken at a disadvantage, but in the surprise of this sudden and correct statement she was oddly silenced.

"I don't believe it," snapped the squire, perfectly satisfied with his elder daughter's care and economy. "I only believe that her taste is not so ridiculously extravagant as yours. Bless me, at what will girls stop nowadays!"

"At nothing, sir," rejoined Marjorie, readily.

"I think not, indeed. Girls were very different when I was young."

"I expect they always did their best, even in those faultless days, to look well according to their means, sir; and I always think there is one bit in 'The Vicar of Wakefield' which wars against nature. You remember where the two girls come in gorgeously dressed for church, and the Vicar remonstrates with them so effectually that they 'go with great composure' that very instant to change their dresses. If Goldsmith had had grown-up daughters of his own, he never would have written that."

"That is your idea, is it?" asked her father, with a sneer.

Marjorie gazed meditatively into his face as she answered,

"'Them's my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I meäns to stick.' Now, what are you going to allow me extra, papa?"

"Nothing," replied the squire, crossly, as he went round to the fire.

Marjorie's quizzical eyes followed him. "'Thou art so near—and yet so far,'" she sung, audaciously. "I ought to be allowed to take the shine out of Louisa now and then," she went on, presently, in a pleasant, unvexed tone. "Don't make faces at me, Louie; I hope it *was* slang. You see, papa, Louisa has the beauty always, so it is but fair that she should give place to me on rare occasions. When I have a new dress, I can manage to carry off the palm at a ball, and I do so like to make new conquests."

"You hope your new acquaintances will like you better than the old ones who know you better, I suppose," put in Louisa.

"Not so much that," rejoined Marjorie, with a whimsical glance at her father, "as because I'm tired of the old conquests."

"And so you take up a different order altogether," sneered Miss Castillain.

"I advise you, Marjorie," struck in the squire, turning sharply to her, "just to take care how you try to play fast and loose with *one* of your conquests, as you call them. If you lose him, it will be the same as losing every friend you have."

"I'm sure to lose him without the attraction of a new dress," sighed Marjorie. "I feel it over me like a covering, as Mrs. Fry has it in her book."

"You must go looking well," returned her father, shortly, "looking as well as your sister; but you must do it on your own allowance. Others can."

"Oh, what a cram!" cried the girl, with a good-humored shrug of her shoulders; for which gesture, as well as for the forbidden term, she offered no sort of apology.

"Really, Marjorie," began her sister, "papa has so often prohibited that style of—"

"Look here, papa," struck in his younger daughter, debonnairly, "Neil Athelston has fallen hopelessly in love with his mother's companion, and I expect I shall have to be the one to 'break it gently to his mother.' Won't there be a scene!"

The squire gazed at her, incredulous and bewildered. Was this one of her random speeches only? Or was it the utterance of a horrible doubt which had been lately hovering vaguely about him?

"I'm not a bit surprised," she continued, quietly setting down her empty cup. "No man could have resisted her last night when she sung 'The Blind Girl to her Harp.' Louisa, didn't she look beautiful, perfectly beautiful, at that harp of Lady Athelston's? I wonder whether her ladyship ever played it as well, and I wonder who taught Miss Chester? I shall be obliged to have lessons."

"It strikes me you are talking an inexcusable amount of rubbish," interrupted Mr. Castillain, snappishly. "What does that girl—only a kind of upper servant in the house, after all, though I've nothing to say against her—what does she want coming forward as she does, and being made so much of?"

"She amuses and entertains Lady Athelston. What higher mission could a girl have? and she's paid to do it, don't you know?" returned Marjorie. "I'm only telling you how her beauty and her voice struck me—and others, too; but, then,

she was not the only beautiful girl there. Louie looked very well—exceedingly well—and sung well, too, appealing to the audience with, 'Oh, say not woman's heart is bought!' There wasn't any one there who would have been impolite enough to say it; but still it was wise to be on the safe side. And after *that*, you should have heard Eustace Jelfrey requesting us to 'Oh! leave him to his sorrow!'"

"By heavens, Marjorie!" interposed the squire, getting very red in the face, "you can be an utter idiot when you like! What has all this to do with Neil Athelston and yourself? Did you make yourself disagreeable?"

"I?" questioned Marjorie, with slow astonishment. "Oh no; I always make myself agreeable to Neil. That's why I am jealous of Miss Chester, and that's why I was so anxious to sing 'I wish I didn't love him, or that he loved me.'"

"Marjorie, how very vulgar some of your ideas are!" drawled Louisa, as she rose from her seat.

"But I resisted the temptation," concluded Marjorie, musingly, "and enjoyed myself as much as I always do—with Neil."

"Of course you do," assented her father, in a quick tone of relief, "and of course you always will, though you talk a great deal of rubbish and buffoonery. Now, don't let me hear any thing more of Miss Chester's absurd ambition; I hope you know your own position too well even to notice it. Mind you go to that ball looking as you ought to look. You can afford it well enough."

Uttering which genial and generous command, Mr. Castillain left the room.

"Poets have written, and minstrels have sung 'A Father's Love,'" laughed Marjorie, as the door closed behind him, but its depths have not quite been sounded yet."

The sisters were standing opposite each other at the fire now, Marjorie with one foot on the fender, and her shoulder against the chimney-piece; and Louisa upright on the rug, selecting various keys from the little basket in her hand.

"Before you go, Louie," said her sister, with a sudden change to that gentle wistfulness which seemed as much to belong to her winning voice as its gayety did, "I want to ask you one question. When we were at High Athelston last night, Lady Athelston told me that you had been writing again for her about Miss Chester, having been tired of waiting for an answer to your last letter. Is this true?"

"Quite true," assented Miss Castillain, setting the key-basket down upon the table again, and showing nothing of surprise.

With a strong effort, Marjorie checked the words that rose to her lips, and uttered very different ones.

"Why?" she asked, quite gently. "Was not one letter enough?"

"We can not tell until we know the result of the second one," answered Louisa, chillily.

"Do you think it didn't reach London?"

"How can I tell?" asked the elder sister. "If it were not that—that I know who posted it, I should say there had been foul play."

"From whom?"

"From Miss Chester, or her accomplices—whoever they may be."

"But you *do* know who posted it, and so that is impossible," returned Marjorie, calmly.

She paused a little, then continued with strange earnestness,

"Louie, is that—that second letter gone?"

"Yes."

"And—" the girl's eyes had a dark, sad passion in them, but still she was gentle in all she said—"and again it has been posted by some one you know, and can depend upon?"

"Yes," replied Miss Castillain, jingling her keys with idle nonchalance.

"You are quite sure it is too late to stop it?"

"Quite; even if any one were deceitful enough to wish it stopped."

"Are you never afraid, Louisa, that the wrong you do to others will be visited on yourself—as it is written?"

The low, pained words were uttered without faltering, but the strange passion which darkened her sister's eyes bewildered, and for a moment almost frightened, Miss Castillain.

"Marjorie would have stopped that letter if she could," she thought to herself, as she made her way to the store-room. "What a good thing that Eustace and I got it off so cleverly the day before yesterday! I wish Lady Athelston had not got gossiping about it to her—it's just like the stupid old thing."

Then Louisa, with her senses all about her, met (and shortened) the demands of the cook, who was housekeeper, and the old man-servant, who was butler and footman in one; while, in the dingy breakfast-room, Marjorie still stood against the chimney-piece, with her face hidden in her hands, and her eyes aching in their tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE.

At the unpainted old wooden gate which led into the kitchen-garden at Hawkedale stood Marjorie Castillain, on the day of the Athelston ball. She was dressed for walking, but she lingered here in the face of the cutting November wind, and with nothing more attractive to gaze upon than an old gardener sweeping the dead leaves into heaps.

There was a thoughtfulness in the girl's face and attitude, though, with which the old gardener and the dead leaves had nothing to do; but this all changed and vanished suddenly when her sister's voice reached her, and Miss Castillain herself strolled into sight round the corner of the house.

"Come, Marjorie, what are you staring at?"

"A most curious spectacle," rejoined Marjorie, without turning her eyes, or moving from her leaning posture against the gate. "You see that ancient recruit of the squire's, and you see that he hasn't a single hair on his head. Well, a few minutes ago he wanted his knife—a great old four-bladed implement—and where do you think he took it from? Out of his cap. Just fancy carrying that trifle on his bald head!"

"Dear me, Marjorie, you always seem to me to be remarking on bald heads," said her sister. "It was only yesterday you told me that the trees in November, with a few leaves sticking here and there, reminded you of a bald-headed man. I never heard such ridiculous similes."

"Except from me," smiled Marjorie, good-

humoredly. "What do you want with me, Louisa?"

"I'm going to the school-room now, to see the clothing-club purchases. Are you ready?"

"I'm not going," rejoined Marjorie, almost sadly. "Of what use am I?"

"Never mind that. You ought to go," rejoined Miss Castillain, promptly.

"No, I oughtn't," her sister answered, as promptly.

"Yes, you ought, Marjorie. Every body says you ought to help me in these good works; and it is really wicked of you to neglect them as you do."

"Don't preach to me," put in Marjorie, with cheerfulness.

"If I don't tell you what you ought to do, I don't know who will," said Louisa, stonily. "I don't know who else would take the trouble, for such a thankless return."

"Have you finished?" asked Marjorie, turning to her, with raised eyebrows. "I don't value your sermons an atom, Louie; I feel, on the whole, more pious without them; and I'm not going to the schools. I don't want a walk. I'm reserving my complexion for the ball."

"I shall tell Neil that to-night," said Louisa, with her unpleasant little laugh. "And I wouldn't tell falsehoods if I were you. You told some of the women that you should go to see their things to-day."

"Ah! so I did," was the bright answer. "Come along—I'm ready."

"And you are going that way, are you?" inquired Miss Castillain, with a glance at her sister's garden-hat and old leather gauntlets.

"In these gloves, you mean? Of course I am. I never feel quite happy unless I have a pair of these on hand."

"I don't care," grumbled Louisa, as they went on together. "If you choose to look a fright, I can't help it."

"No one would ever think, would they," questioned Marjorie, gravely, "that I was the daughter of a millionaire? I hope he will get to hear public opinion so expressed. How dare he allow me only such a pittance, and call it enough? How dare he refuse to give me ever so little extra, when I entreat, as a week ago I entreated, for a dress to wear to-night?"

"Well, I am sure you are coming out quite gorgeous enough, after all," put in Louisa, a little spitefully.

"Of course. I've mortgaged to a tremendous extent, though, to obtain that pleasing result. *Now* if I don't make a sensation, I know it will be through your bringing me out into this cutting wind, to destroy my complexion, and make my nose red."

"Perhaps some propitious fate will lure Miss Chester out, too, on this all-important day," suggested Louisa, with her hard laugh.

"Nothing could destroy Miss Chester's complexion," asserted Marjorie, generously, "nor make her nose red; and if you think for a moment that I ever dream of rivaling *her*, Louisa, you are wildly mistaken."

"Of course not. Your friendship for Lady Athelston's companion is just the romantic and delightful friendship of two people who have one strong taste in common, and pursue one noble end. Wait until the noble end has to make a choice."

"'O jest unseen, inscrutable, invisible, as a nose on a man's face, or a weather-cock on a steeple!'" said Marjorie, laughing heartily. "Here we are! What a pity! We might have enjoyed a few more piquant and spicy little jokes."

The afternoon was drawing to a close when Marjorie caught sight, from the school-room window, of Lina Chester walking alone over the fields toward High Athelston. The women's tea was over. Marjorie had done her part in amusing and providing for them, and now she slipped away and joined Lina.

"I'm so glad," she said, taking her hand; "I want a walk, and I will go a little way with you."

Something in Marjorie Castillain's manner to her for the last week had been new to Lina, and puzzled her a good deal. There were a tenderness and pitifulness in it, as if some sorrow were felt for her which she could not feel for herself. Ah! how could it be otherwise, when Marjorie knew how cunningly her sister had done her cruel work at last, and that that discovery which Lina dreaded might happen now on any day?

"Have you been to the school, then, Miss Castillain?"

"Yes, officiating at Louisa's clothing-club festival, which was a most depressing success."

"Did you aid in the depression or the success, Miss Marjorie?" asked Lina, laughing.

"I didn't know what to do. Louisa said I must go, so I went; but I could only conduct myself according to my dim lights, trying on the shawls and pouring out the tea. I should have come off with flying colors if there had been sufficient breeze to fly them, which is, being interpreted, if I'd been sufficiently appreciated."

Glancing down into her companion's face, Marjorie paused a minute, as if her lips longed to utter other words; but at that instant Lina looked up with a smile, and then Marjorie resumed her light tones.

"You should have seen one old woman, Lina; you would have laughed. She took her place at my table with the most resigned and absorbed expression of countenance, and then, sighing very plaintively, helped herself to cake. While she gave me a melancholy recital of her widowhood, she slid the cake into her lap, and pocketed it; and this she did over and over again, sighing each time more and more heavily, and looking more and more lugubrious; yet each time I handed her the cake she helped herself to the largest piece with much humility. Oh, Lina, I did wonder how far south her pocket extended! Will you come with me across the meadow, and out into Nether Lane—to Mr. Spendir's cottage?"

The question was asked so suddenly, that it was no wonder Lina hesitated.

"Do come," urged Marjorie. "I have a request I want to make; and you know the little boy has been ill; I want to ask after him. Oh, Lina, it has been almost more than I could bear, to go and see him through his fever, and to find him always, always reading aloud to his father when he was able. Such funny books too! I can't think where they got them, unless at the second-hand place in Churchill. And there was the father always sitting at his work, ready to listen and sympathize and talk, but always busy. I know he works too hard. He is etching borders in Miss Jorden's album now, and putting so

much beautifully fine work in them, for hardly any payment, I know; and all the time the boy reads on and on. Oh, Lina, what a funny life it is for them! Think of *his* education, and of Jack Esdaile's; and yet I know the artist's boy has the better tutor. How I wonder what their lives will be!"

"They are all marked out for them, I suppose," said Lina, gently.

"Oh, hush!" cried Marjorie, in hasty earnestness. "That's a terrible idea; don't promulgate it. My one consolation at night is that to-morrow *may* bring forth any thing."

And so, talking of every thing but that one sad subject which was uppermost in Marjorie's mind, they reached the cottage.

Miss Castillain's errand to Mr. Spendir was to ask him to give her a few lessons in drawing; and Lina stood by, in wondering silence, to hear him pleasantly and courteously refuse.

"I really could not do it, Miss Castillain, however much I wished," he said. "I have seen a drawing of yours far better than any of mine, and—"

"And what, Mr. Spendir?" she asked, quizzically.

"And this wish," he said, the scarlet rising slowly in his dark face, "is only a continuance of the kindness you have shown us all through Jet's illness. "I can not help understanding it so."

"This is too bad, when I had set my heart upon it," fretted Marjorie; "and I have been saving on purpose. If you only knew the difficulty of saving on a small allowance, Mr. Spendir, you would value my efforts."

Again the red rushed over the artist's dark skin.

"I know that difficulty, Miss Castillain," he answered, quietly.

"Do you? Then will you consent to teach me?" the girl asked, eagerly.

"I could not," he said, with a laugh which was not very genuine; "it would be a case of Bleys and Merlin. Please don't ask me."

And Marjorie, seeing how much in earnest he was, though knowing that that was not his reason, let it pass.

"I can, at any rate, spend on his child those savings which he is too proud to take," she thought.

"I shall slowly saunter back," said Marjorie, when the girls stood at the gate before they parted. "I've quarreled with Louisa, and can not with dignity address her for two hours at least. Lina"—the words kept back so long were on her lips at last, while a great tenderness shone in her beautiful eyes—"Lina, I am always dull, and—and foreboding like—in the dusk of a November day; are you? and I feel now as if, at any minute, I might be suddenly made to face some unexpected fear or sorrow. So I want to be sure that *you* would be my firm friend through all, and that I might, in all confidence, come to you for help and sympathy."

"Oh, Miss Castillain," began Lina; but some look in Marjorie's face, and some sweet new tone in her wooing voice, made Lina's words falter, and her eyes grow sad and wistful.

"And, Lina, before we separate will you promise me—oh, promise, dear, as I have promised you—that if any unexpected danger threatens *you*, you will come to me, just as I shall come to you; and let me help and sympathize with you—I will not say as a sister would, but as any one would who loved you *very* truly, *very* trustingly?"

The thanks faltered on Lina's lips, but she gave Marjorie her hand with a grateful, child-like confidence; and no uttered words could have made the compact a more sacred one than it was, sealed only with that silent hand-clasp.

All the thoughtful gravity vanished from Marjorie's face when suddenly, on her return across the fields, she met Sir Neil Athelston riding home alone, in his hunting-dress.

"Good sport, Neil?"

"Capital. Why wasn't your father with us to-day, Marjorie?"

"He didn't feel very brilliant," she answered, laughing. "He had a tiring day yesterday, as well as an adventure. He was shooting, and in one of the covers he left his hat and wig in a bramble. He hasn't yet quite got over it—the circumstance, I mean, not the bramble."

"He saved his head, I hope?" laughed Sir Neil.

"Oh yes," replied the girl, gravely. "Trust a Castillain to save something. I came to see the start this morning, as I promised, Neil, but I wouldn't go farther. I wouldn't drive, because Miss Chester wouldn't; and papa forbids me to ride, because I *must* follow the hounds when I have the chance."

"Why didn't you persuade her?" asked Neil, flushing as he spoke of Lina Chester, even so casually.

"I had no hope of succeeding," said Marjorie, gravely, "when I saw you turn back on purpose to persuade her—and fail."

"How did you know?" asked Neil, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, I knew, though the popular opinion was that you went back for your smelling-bottle."

"Hold hard, Marjorie. What an awfully sarcastic girl you are! I am not such a fop as that."

"No—oh no," assented the girl, readily; "popular opinion was, as usual, at fault."

"Have you had your bouquet for to-night, Marjorie?"

"No, I don't intend to carry one. It is conventional to carry a bouquet and fan. I hate conventionality."

"But you will carry the flowers I send you, Marjorie?" he asked, smiling.

"Of course," she said, with a quick change in her tone.

"That's right. I will take care that they are worth wearing. You are sure to look nice, Marjorie."

"And so are you, Neil," the girl said, with a comical glance into his blue eyes.

"I verily believe you think I care how I look."

"I don't think," she answered, with raised eyebrows; "I am sure."

"You always did give me chief credit for that sort of thing," he muttered, with an annoyed emphasis.

"Yes," she answered, slowly, "and for more. We are very old friends, Neil," she went on, with unexpected seriousness. "Let us think as little ill of each other as we possibly can, and—and *always* trust each other."

"Of course I always shall—I couldn't help it," said Neil, not understanding one half the generous earnestness of the girl, nor faintly guessing either what sort of a sorrow she feared for him, or what the offer of her trust and sympathy should mean.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BALL AT HIGH ATHELSTON.

Lady Athelston had sent her maid to beg Miss Chester's attendance in her room as soon as she was dressed that night; and Fletcher stood at Lina's door, looking frigidly in upon the girl, as she delivered her message.

Margaret had been assisting Miss Chester; but Margaret had gone away now, and Lina was sitting alone at the fire, writing with just as much ease as if she had not been dressed for one of the state balls of High Athelston. "And not looking at all like it, either," thought Fletcher. "She's not much used to company, that's certain—as why should she be?—and what my lady wants with her down-stairs at all, I can't think."

"Yes, I am ready; I will come in a few minutes. You need not wait," said Lina, looking up from her desk, and speaking with that gentle dignity which belonged to her, and which so often baffled Sir Neil Athelston.

"Dear me!" muttered Fletcher, as she retraced her steps along the brilliantly lighted corridors, "to think that such as she can put on airs and graces to me, and yet that I don't return it to her in so many direct words! I did hear her beg my lady to let her stay in her own room to-night, and I can't think why on earth she shouldn't. It doesn't seem to me very proper for the companion to be just like the guests; it never is in any other family that I know. Why, dear me! I might just as well dress up and go myself; though as for dressing up," concluded Fletcher, with a haughty sniff, "it isn't much she's done to herself, after all; and it isn't very nice that she'll look among ladies—among ladies who know where laces and flowers and jewels ought to be worn."

Lina, all unconscious of this free and unflattering criticism, followed the maid to Lady Athelston's dressing-room, and stood, a little shyly and a little doubtfully, beside the chair where her ladyship sat patiently undergoing Fletcher's finishing touches among the laces on the thick light hair in which there was no trace of the silver either of age or thought.

"Well," she questioned, looking up into her companion's face with a smile, "have you reconciled yourself to the prospect of the crowd—or, rather, have you come to your senses?"

"I still wish—I still wish with all my heart that you would not bid me join your guests, my lady," said the girl, with a wistful earnestness in her voice.

"You silly child!" Lady Athelston answered, speaking almost tenderly, as it seemed (at times) most natural to do to the lonely, unselfish, gentle girl, whose influence over her was true and wise, and whose own noble qualities could not but rouse the dormant good of other natures, where the good might be dormant, and the soil but shallow. "You very silly child!" she repeated, laughing. "Sir Neil and Miss Castillain will want to hear you at my old harp again, and I shall want you to talk it all over with me to-morrow. I can not let you off, and I am sure you will enjoy it; girls always do enjoy a gay scene such as this will be; though, of course, *you* will not dance, unless for some special reason. You could not dance, you know, my dear, even if any one were polite enough to ask you, while any of the lady guests sat."

"And I do not care to dance," said Lina, in cold, quiet tones.

"Well, now," remarked Lady Athelston, not, of course, having heard that reply, "come round here; I want to see you, now that you are dressed. What nonsense is this?" she added, sharply, as Lina went up to the fire. "You don't call yourself dressed for a ball, do you? I don't like any thing so dowdy as that. Why do you wear a high dress? Turn round again."

Lina turned, a shy smile on her lips, and Lady Athelston scrutinized her keenly through her glittering eyeglass. But though for the moment vexed in her surprise, the displeasure could not rest in Lady Athelston's eyes as they took in the surpassing beauty of the girl at whom she gazed.

Over a long, untrimmed dress of white silk, low in the neck, and with small, short sleeves, she wore an upper skirt and high body of soft, transparent white, the exquisite whiteness of her neck and arms gleaming through it, unrelieved by gold or jewels of any kind, but the whiteness of the whole broken artistically by the tiny bouquet at her neck of crimson fuchsia and delicate fern.

"Nothing even in your hair!" cried Lady Athelston, gazing from the girl's anxious, beautiful face to the dark hair dressed high on the graceful head.

"You do not look pleased, Lady Athelston," she said, almost beseechingly. "I had better far not go into the reception-rooms."

"Rubbish, child!" echoed her ladyship, curtly. "I choose you shall come; and—and I don't think you look bad. I don't think you *could* look any thing but—any thing but well, wear what you may. But something in your face always puzzles me stupidly, some familiarity in the features. Pooh! I have so often said I will not think of it any more. It only makes me worry, and does no good, and it will turn out only some ridiculous fancy when I do find out of whom you remind me. Come."

"Sir Neil says," remarked Lina, with a strange anxiety in her eyes, and a tightening of her lips, "that my face reminds him of one of the pictures in the portrait-gallery here, but that he can never be quite sure which picture it is."

"A stupid fancy like my own, I suppose," returned Lady Athelston, rather sharply, as she gave one quick glance into the beautiful, grave face beside her. "Come along, child."

The ball-room at High Athelston (or, as the Old Athelstons called it, the Banqueting Hall) extended all down one wing, and looked to Lina a vast and brilliant vista of flowers and lights, as she and Lady Athelston lingered a minute at the door, on their way down to the drawing-rooms.

In the small gallery at one end, the musicians were taking their places, the leader receiving some directions from Sir Neil, who stood on the waxed floor, talking up to him. But the instant the young baronet caught sight of his mother

and her companion, he turned on his heel and joined them, his whole face lighting up.

Sir Neil Athelston was one of those well-made and high-bred men on whom any dress sits gracefully and well, and who, in modern full dress—a trying test—look always handsome, with a real grace and ease. Lina saw this, though she was hardly aware that the thought had shaped itself to her, yet the brightness which the gayety of the scene had brought to her eyes died completely and suddenly out of them when he came up to her side, throwing back his head a little, while his laughing blue eyes took in every item of her dress.

"How beautiful!" he exclaimed, involuntarily. "And yet is it a real sort of ball-dress? It is too white, and too plain—and yet, what *does* make you look so lovely?"

She moved away, to allow Sir Neil to offer his arm to his mother.

"You are resplendent, my lady," he said, merrily, as he gave it her. "Wait there one moment, Miss Chester, and I will come for you."

But Lina preferred to follow, and when Neil turned from the drawing-room door, there she was, close to him. Then, meeting her suddenly so, something in her appearance struck him. He started a little, his eyes intent.

"Is it the old puzzling likeness, Sir Neil?" she asked, lightly, as she moved to pass him.

But whatever it had been, he turned it nervously away now, and spoke of something else—taking a kind of refuge in the new complaint he had found against her.

"You have not my flowers, Miss Chester; and the few you wear you have gathered and arranged yourself, as I can see. Why do you always neglect what I myself choose and cut for you?"

"I like my own choice, thank you," she said, gravely. "I asked you not to trouble yourself."

"It is no trouble," said Sir Neil; "nothing is any trouble that I do for you; if you only would not scorn, as you do, all my attempts to please you, and—"

"And to make me look passable," added Lina, lightly.

"You know that *that* is not what I mean," said the baronet, rather angrily; "but stop, Miss Chester, let me give you your programme. How many dances will you give me?"

"I am not going to dance," she said. "I do not want a programme."

"Nonsense!" he cried, now really angry; "you must dance. No meddler in this house shall prevent that, while I am master here."

Lady Athelston had passed on now, up the brilliant rooms, and so was doubly out of hearing. Lina looked after her rather wistfully, but she could answer Sir Neil coolly too, and he could not detect the tone of satire in her voice.

"I think you have no need to remind us that you are master in the house, Sir Neil; but even in that capacity you can not make its inmates dance against their will."

"I must make *you*," he said, entreatingly. "If I dance with no one else in all the room, I will dance with you, Miss Chester."

"Please let me pass, Sir Neil. Lady Athelston will wonder where I am."

"Let her wonder!" ejaculated her son, impatiently. "I have something to say to you, which I must say now, for the words force themselves from me. Don't turn away. By Heaven, Lina, you think nothing of insulting a fellow in his own house!"

"I do not want to insult you," interrupted Lina, in quick pain. "I wish you never would speak to me so, Sir Neil. Why will you not remember that I am here only as a paid dependent of your mother's?"

Even Neil could see what difficulty the girl had in uttering these words, and that only a great fear could have wrung them from her; but, in his selfishness and infatuation, he had no pity.

"Lina," he whispered, taking one of her gloved hands in both of his, "don't say those words again; they hurt me—and, by all I love! they anger me beyond words. My mother doesn't care for your help—your patient, uncomplaining help. Any other girl—one who is not fit to hold a candle to you, even in your sleep—would suit her selfish will, would save her idle hands, as well as you are doing. She does not value you, and it makes me mad to see her placid acceptance of your service. She does not love you," he went on, a deep passion stirring his voice, "and I do—beyond any thing else on earth. Lina, come away with me."

The beautiful, innocent eyes, never flinching in their gaze, met his in simple, child-like surprise.

"Sir Neil, I am tired of this jest. Will you let me join my lady?"

"Don't call her 'my lady,'" he interrupted, pettishly; "you only do it to vex me. I hate to hear any thing servile from your lips, and you know it. Lina, my darling," he broke off again, his short-lived anger dwindling before his passionate admiration, "my beautiful little darling, I know they none of them think of you as I think of you, and they can never love you as I love you; there's no one in the world who could. Come away from them all. Let me take you where no cold looks can ever reach you and pain you. My darling, see how I am waiting to choose you before all the world."

The white face was hardly whiter than its wont; but a great fear and a terrible distress darkened the wide eyes which were still raised to his, and which never drooped as she answered, with brave quietness,

"It will be easy for me to forget these meaningless words of yours, Sir Neil. Before this ball is over, they will be for both of us as if they had never been uttered. Listen, your first guests have arrived."

These first guests were the Misses Castillain; and so soon they entered after Lina's words, that the quick eyes of Neil's betrothed caught the startled and defeated glance upon his face, and understood the very unusual constraint of his manner; but neither a smile nor a shade of pique showed him that she saw it. Before she had ceased her greeting to Lina, he had regained his easy composure—regained it entirely, though by a great effort—and was ready to pay attention to his first guests, just in his old vain, idle, yet pleasant way.

He offered Louisa Castillain his arm to lead her up the suite of rooms to Lady Athelston; and Marjorie, still lingering with Miss Chester, followed them with her eyes.

"Doesn't Louie look killing?" she asked, only to hide some graver thought.

Lina smiled, without answering. She was not thinking of Miss Castillain, in her flounced and flower-strewed dress, but of the younger sister, who leaned with careless grace upon a fauteuil near, looking so wonderfully bright and winning.

"Do you like my dress, Lina?" she asked, so suddenly that Lina started from her intent gaze.

"I was not thinking of the dress," she said, stammering.

"Of course not. I never guessed it. But I can not afford to mortgage my half-year's income and win no admiration in return. Please to admire me."

"I think, Miss Castillain," said Lina, shyly, "that I never know exactly what you wear, because—because what you wear is always so thoroughly a part of you. I could never imagine not liking a dress of yours, as I could never imagine not liking *you*."

"Thanks!" said Marjorie, with a laugh; "my spirits are rising. You don't know how they fell when Louisa told me that she never did admire my taste, and that the less I questioned her about it, the better."

"I think," said Lina, "that you look like an old picture. I mean the picture of a girl of fifty years ago."

"Old-fashioned, eh?" laughed Marjorie, rising, queen-like, in her rich and quaintly made dress and tunic of delicate pink silk and soft white lace; the bright brown hair, a wealth of beauty in itself, crowned by a tiny cap of lace, fine almost as a spider's web, which was, in design and fabric, the very essence of coquetry. "But do you know, Lina—either your words put it into my head, or the look of you—you remind me of a picture, too; and a picture in this very house? Don't be offended that I don't pay you the compliment you paid me, and imply that you look picturesque; for the picture you remind me of is—it can't be," mused the girl, checking herself; "and yet—Lina, you small, beautiful girl, can it be possible for you to remind me of a gentleman's portrait?"

"I don't know," laughed Lina, constrainedly; "I suppose such chance likenesses sometimes occur."

"Marjorie," said Sir Neil, joining them again—(and Marjorie Castillain noticed that, for all the excitement in his voice, it had a heaviness quite new to it)—"Marjorie, you, too, have neglected my flowers."

Marjorie detected the unconscious emphasis, and understood it.

"There was too much scarlet for my pink," she said, curtly.

"I'm very sorry; why did you not tell me what colors you wished? You have no flowers at all."

"No," she answered, with her bright, ready blush; "Colonel Stuart sent his bouquet to Louisa and me, conjointly; so of course I wouldn't touch it. I hate partnership with Louie!"

"You like things sent definitely to one of you?" questioned Neil, with rather a forced laugh; "and you don't care which?"

"I like them to be intended for Cæsar *or* Pompey," she said—"especially Pompey."

Then Neil took Marjorie, too, up to his mother; and Lina still lingered alone in the great outer drawing-room, not guessing that Marjorie's willingness to leave her behind was only kindness.

"How can you make that poor girl join in these things, Neil?" asked Louisa, speaking low, as he and Marjorie came up. "It must be a wretched ordeal for her. What can she understand of high society?"

"As much as is necessary."

"If she does come among your guests," Miss Castillain continued, biting her lips a little, but still speaking suavely, as she always did to Neil or his mother, "she ought to have proper feeling, and come dressed suitably. No old maid or dowager would look so dowdy and stiff in her dress."

"What, Neil?" his mother questioned, catching a little of this speech. "What are you all saying?"

"Louisa says," returned Sir Neil, with a twinkle in his eyes, "that your little companion is a model for dowagers; thinking, I suppose, that she comports herself like a duchess."

"The duchesses would not feel much flattered," said Louisa, with her harsh laugh, though she pretended to take it pleasantly in jest.

"I only know one duchess," said Marjorie, "and *she* doesn't comport herself at all. I pity Miss Chester if she is like that little awkward dumpling."

Neil glanced at her, and for the life of him he could not prevent his eyes thanking her; but Marjorie little heeded that. She had let him bring her away from Lina for Lina's own sake; but other guests were arriving now, and so she made her way among them (showering gay smiles and greetings as she went), back to the spot where Lina Chester lingered, looking on at the gay scene as one may remember to have looked at such things in a dream.

How kind and thoughtful Marjorie was to her all through that night! And, when Colonel Stuart came, he was so, too, in his grave, protecting way. With his ever-ready, ever-thoughtful courtesy, he gave her a place among the most honored of the guests, and such a place as Sir Neil's impetuous admiration and devotion could never have succeeded in establishing for her.

And yet what way will the protecting kindness of one or two simple, unsuspicious natures go, against the subtle poison of jealous and suspicious tongues? Even the whispered comments of Louisa Castillain alone could have destroyed Lina Chester's pleasure; but they alone were not left to do it. Eustace Jelfrey held a similar power in his hands, and used it mercilessly, too.

Perhaps Sir Neil Athelston held a greater power of hurting her even than these two. Though his opportunities of speaking to her were few (as he had a host's part to play), yet he could unconsciously interfere most of all with her enjoyment, by rousing the jealousy and spleen of those who were quick to resent the unconscious rivalry of the girl who, in her dependent position, stood so far below them, yet in her wondrous beauty so far above.

Lina was standing by the couch on which sat Lady Athelston. She had been called for some trifling reason; and then, with a careless selfishness, Lady Athelston had bidden her "stay there a little; I may want you."

And the girl stood there, pleased even at those

words. There was some one to whom she might possibly be of use.

The ball was at its height. The couples whirled past close to the sofa against which Lina stood; it was a gay and brilliant scene altogether, and the music gave her beautiful, dreamy thoughts. She would think of the pleasant part, and that only. Poor, lonely girl! Simple as the resolution was, no other more really brave, more purely unselfish, was made in all the radiant throng that night.

Only a few of the moving figures did Lina's eyes care to follow, and of these the chief was Marjorie Castillain, who jested randomly, and laughed brightly, and danced exquisitely, yet who seemed (to those grateful, watchful eyes) to be always fighting against some want which rose to her lips and eyes.

"How openly and daringly Marjorie Castillain flirts!" was a comment which had reached Lina's ears many times; and she knew that it was true, and yet not *all* the truth; though "all the truth" was not to be made clear yet, even to her.

But, rashly as Marjorie flung her witty words and infectious laughter around her, there was one in the room who received not even the smallest share. To Eustace Jelfrey she vouchsafed neither word nor glance.

Again and again had he entreated for a dance, but her negative was always prompt and cold and decisive; and her repeated refusals and cold neglect were rousing within him a very demon of spite and jealousy.

To one small revenge could Eustace Jelfrey look forward; and, in the anticipation of this, he smiled and danced and flattered still. And the night wore on, and Marjorie, in her brilliant excitement, grew more and more beautiful, with that irresistible and incomprehensible beauty of hers which no one ever could describe.

Colonel Stuart was lingering beside Lady Athelston's couch; the very duchess whom Marjorie had called a dumpling had been talking into the elevated trumpet, but she broke off on the colonel's approach; for there are some men before whom women's trivial gossip drops lifeless to the ground. Lady Athelston's eyes turned from the dancers, and met his with a pleased little smile in them.

"I am so glad to see you all enjoying yourselves," she said, "as I trust you are. Does not Neil make a matchless host, and is not Marjorie a queen among all the girls, Colonel Stuart? Don't you call her beautiful to-night?"

"Do you, Miss Chester?" he asked, with an amused smile.

"She is always beautiful to me, Colonel Stuart," Lina answered, simply.

"Why?"

"Her face is so intensely winning, and so true."

"But," he said, the smile still in his eyes, "it is never the same two minutes together. How can you judge?"

"It is not judgment exactly, Colonel Stuart," she answered, thoughtfully. "It must be something over which I have less control than my judgment."

"Perhaps so," he said, lightly, though the smile deepened to seriousness in his eyes. "Perhaps it is. Lady Helen Burton has just been giving me her opinion, too, and she summed it up in very few words, and those borrowed ones. She could only say — and very distressed she seemed about it—that 'her manners' have 'not that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere!' Do you think so?"

"I am sure they have not," laughed Lina, softly. "But, if I may borrow words to describe my idea of her, they will be Lord Townley's, in the old play, 'She is pleasant to live with.'"

Colonel Stuart laughed heartily.

"Your words are not half so imposing as Lady Helen's," he said. "'And I'm afraid the title of the old play you quote is rather suggestive of Neil's future. Isn't it 'The Provoked Husband?'"

But now the old duchess rose and took his arm, and they went away together.

"What have you and Colonel Stuart been laughing about, Lina?" inquired Marjorie, when, a few minutes afterward, she escaped from the crowd.

"You, Miss Castillain. Shall I tell you what he says?" asked Lina, trying to look as if she were as happy as Marjorie seemed to be, only because she fancied Marjorie would like to think her so.

"I know," Miss Castillain answered, a look of strange weariness crossing her face just for an instant; "he said, what he has said before to-night, that he despises a flirt; he never even uses the less despicable French word. Lina, do you hate a flirt?"

"A real one? Yes," replied Lina, hesitating over the truthful word.

"A real one!" echoed Marjorie, with her bright, low laugh. "Oh! doesn't that show the narrowness of the English language? A flirt is a flirt, Lina; defined, a contemptible specimen of flighty, volatile womanhood. Oh! isn't English a small language?"

"I dislike the French word much more," said Lina, gravely.

"So do I," was the quick reply. "I hate all words that express it, if there are more than those two, which I hope there are not."

"And yet—"

"Yes—*and yet*," interrupted Marjorie, with a quick, gentle touch on Lina's arm, "that's all. Don't finish the sentence, my little grave and dear rebuker."

Just then Colonel Stuart returned to claim Marjorie for the approaching dance. She turned to meet his eyes, her own very demure.

"I have changed my mind," she said, naïvely. "You have been flirting," and, by the slight stress she laid upon the word, Lina guessed for what he had been rebuking her; "and it's not at all right, Colonel Stuart, because you know you are engaged to Lady Helen Burton."

Colonel Stuart laughed out frankly, but her eyes never lost their look of serious reproach.

"That is said on good authority," she went on, in cool explanation. "Indeed, I believe that good authority itself told it to Mr. Jelfrey, who told it to me. And so, being engaged, Colonel Stuart," she concluded, her merry lips set solemnly, "it is not honorable in you to behave as you do—especially to the dowagers."

"You have given me the right to speak to you now, Miss Marjorie," said the colonel, with a gentle gravity, which had no vestige of sternness

in it. "I may ask if it is right for you, being engaged, to behave as you do—except to the dowagers?"

The hot blood darted across the girl's face, and rash, proud words passed her lips, words which were no sooner uttered than they were repented of bitterly. But then they were uttered, and what availed the repentance?

"If—if I could only take his words as I take those of other people!" she thought, her heart beating fast in her self-anger and her pain. "If I only could, and did not rise up with every power I possess to vex and thwart him! It is always to do me good that he speaks. But, then—but, then, that's the very reason it's so hard to bear. What business has he to try to do me good? What difference will it make in *his* life whether I'm good or bad? And what right has he always to be the one to remind me of my duty toward Neil? I know I shall tell him some day that it is he who has made me hate Neil—by his very mention of him."

"Miss Marjorie"—Colonel Stuart's was the voice that broke in upon that passionate thought—"from such a speech I judge that the fulfillment of your promise to dance with me would be a drawback to your pleasure; so I will leave you free."

She bowed with a smile upon her lips, and he left her. Then Lina saw how hurt and pained she was.

"It is always the same," she said, impetuously, as Lina laid her gentle little hand on the restless fingers upon which Marjorie leaned at the end of the couch. "Don't look at me, dear; I feel a little idiotic—just as if some one had put me into a dark room to unravel a tangled skein of cobwebs. Don't laugh. What does it mean—you know—about seeing only 'a straight staff bent in a pool?'".

"That out of the pool, Miss Castillain, if we look—"

But Lina broke off here, for Eustace Jelfrey had joined them, and was earnestly begging Marjorie to dance with him.

"I *was* engaged for this dance," she answered, absently, "but am not now. I may as well dance it with you as with any one."

Her assent, almost unconscious though it was, astonished Lina, but it astonished Mr. Jelfrey still more. His eyes flashed exultingly as she took his arm; and Lina, watching his face as he proudly led her off, actually trembled to see how her smile could change him.

Colonel Stuart looked after them as they passed to their places, but he sought no partner himself for this dance, which had been Marjorie's promised one.

Sir Neil Athelston had been watching for his opportunity, and as soon as Lina was left, he sauntered to her; sauntered with as deliberate a step as if his heart-beats had been deliberate too.

"It is only those slow old Lancers next, Miss Chester," he said; "I will take no denial for that dance."

"I can not, Sir Neil," she answered, her eyes almost piteous as she tried to make her refusal easy and natural. "Other ladies will sit, and so I would rather not dance."

"Confound it!" he cried, in his hot impatience, "why must other ladies sitting a dance prevent your joining in it? Are you to be left out all the evening? Some ladies must sit out now and then, as there are fewer gentlemen than ladies here. Marjorie says there always are," he added, with his gay laugh, "and that nature ought to thin the ladies, as a gardener does his stocks. But I think nature thins them quite enough in another way. Come, Miss Chester."

But the gay, wooing tones and outstretched arm were equally unheeded by Lina.

"Mother," said Sir Neil, speaking into the trumpet, with a suppressed petulance, "if you don't insist on Miss Chester dancing the next dance—it's only the Lancers—I shall leave the party altogether. I will not witness the absurdity of her waiting upon you all night, and refusing every one who asks her, as if you were a tyrant."

A clever hit that of Sir Neil's—and it told.

Lady Athelston turned to Lina with an injured frown.

"Miss Chester, how can you be so silly as to hesitate when Sir Neil is good enough to offer to introduce you himself? Go at once, pray; I don't care to be thought a tyrant."

Neil's naturally sleepy eyes were full of laughing triumph when he felt the small gloved hand upon his arm at last.

"Now the room looks what it should look to me," he said, with a sigh of real relief and happiness. "Did you think I was going to deny myself all night? Do you think a man's patience can bear, for long, the isolation you have made me bear to-night, Lina?"

"They are forming for the Lancers, Sir Neil," she said, with quiet coldness. "Shall we take our places?"

"Here, please—a little farther on," he said, leading her to the set farthest from Lady Athelston's group, and nearest to the curtained door which led from the ball-room.

And when the dance was over, turning back again upon his arm, Lina found herself, before she was aware, out in the long and unfrequented gallery.

"I never had such a dance in my life," Sir Neil was saying. "It seemed to be over in less than half a minute. No wonder," he added, his voice sounding doubly low in the vaulted corridor—"it was my first dance with my first love."

"Why do we go this way, Sir Neil?" asked Lina, trying to draw her hand from his. "There is no other entrance to the ball-room. Let us turn."

"You always refuse to understand me, Lina," the young man interrupted, hastily; "you always treat me as if you thought I was making a mistake, or something equally ridiculous. Why won't you understand that I love you as I never loved any one before in my life?"

"Sir Neil," said Lina, very calmly (she had drawn away her hand now, and was standing against one of the long windows, the little white-robed figure looking more beautiful than she imagined, against the heavy crimson curtains)—"Sir Neil, why will you not understand what an insult your love is to me, and how hard it is for me patiently to bear an insult from you?"

"*I* insult you!" he interrupted.

"Yes, with a deeper and more cruel insult than you offered me the day you saw me first."

"How do you mean?" asked Neil, blind to every thought but how he loved her, and happy

only to stand there and gaze upon her beauty. "Tell me how I insult you, Lina, when I would rather anger every soul in there than you alone."

"I do not care to tell you what you know so well, Sir Neil," she answered, wearily. "If you were engaged to me" (calmly as she said it, her thoughts only following out one idea, the scarlet rushed to his face at the words), "would you dare to say to Miss Marjorie Castillain what you have said to me to-night? You know you would not insult her—I must use the word—as you have insulted me; you know that, as the case is reversed, you think no shame of insulting a dependent. What your treachery is to Miss Castillain, I can not bear to say."

"I can not help it," put in Neil, moodily. "I can no more prevent myself loving you than I can prevent your being beautiful. I never loved Marjorie; I know now that I never understood what love meant until I saw you. Oh, Lina! my first love, my only love, why should you be the one to turn away from me—you, the only one to whom I ever pleaded? Let us go away, my darling; wherever you like. The very slightest wish that you can form I will carry out. I have wealth, and power, and strength, and youth. Lina, could you not be happy with me? Oh! surely yes, when I love you with such devotion. Only just one word, my precious love; only whisper one word, and years of happiness can be ours—yours and mine, dear—happiness only like a dream."

"I shall go away from High Athelston, Sir Neil," said Lina, speaking low and almost with calmness, though her heart beat wildly in her fear, and the unusual color burned in a feverish spot on either cheek. "That is the only thing left for me to do."

"Go away!" he echoed, passionately. "If you do go—if you go without me—I shall follow you; ay, to the world's end, my precious one."

And then, in the madness of his love, he forgot her loneliness and her claim upon him, and caught her in his arms and kissed her, as a brave and honorable man would have died rather than kiss one woman while he was engaged to another.

A moment afterward he stood alone where she had left him, the blood dyeing his face as the sound of a distant step made him turn again hurriedly. Then, face to face, the two men met who were never to meet as friends after this night.

A few skillfully chosen and well-timed words from Eustace Jelfrey won the truth from Sir Neil; and a little advice, crafty as the man's nature, sent him back to the ball-room, hopeful again. Then the tutor passed down the gallery in his search for Lina, smiling as he went.

CHAPTER XX.

JELFREY'S LAST THREAT.

Louisa Castillain held Lady Athelston in custody in a secluded recess in one of the drawing-rooms. Dancing was still going on in the Banqueting Hall, but since supper Louisa had been in attendance—generously supplying Miss Chester's place, as she gave Lady Athelston to understand—and had denied herself the society of her partners, just to spend an hour among those elders who had grown a little weary of the dancing, and had taken refuge here.

These two were in the midst of an energetic dialogue, which had been carried on in subdued tones ever since they had been settled in this snug retreat.

"But of course, if you find, when you receive the answer to this second letter, that what I suspect is really true," Miss Castillain remarked, "you will at once dismiss Miss Chester. You can hardly do otherwise, can you, dear Lady Athelston?"

"I—I suppose not," she replied, not overreadily. "I suppose it will be necessary."

"It would be bad, even for the girl herself, to retain her in your service under those circumstances," remarked Miss Castillain, charitably. "It would be bad even for the whole household. Think how every one in the county values your judgment, Lady Athelston, and then think how they would feel if they knew you had kept an impostor on as your companion. We can not, indeed, afford to lose our confidence in you," concluded Louisa, with a bewitching smile; "we can afford almost any thing better than that. And then think," she added, thoughtfully, "how bad it will be for Neil to have her in the house. There will surely be some unpleasantness. She will make mischief between him and Marjorie. Oh, of course you will judge it quite necessary to dismiss her at once!"

And Lady Athelston, acting entirely under Louisa's influence now, as she must always act under the influence of some one, promised to do what Miss Castillain thought right, and owned that what Louisa proposed *would* be exactly right; but still a qualm hovered over her.

"Neil is so odd," she said: "he may be angry."

"He *is* odd," assented Louisa, with no sign of having cunningly brought the conversation round to this point; "therefore I think the safest and wisest thing for you to do would be to dismiss Miss Chester quietly, when Neil is away."

"Yes, that would be better," said Lady Athelston, as if the very anticipation of his absence were a relief.

"Then that is all arranged?" questioned Miss Castillain, with no evidence of being pleased herself, "and I am sure it is wisely planned. But, dear Lady Athelston, do promise me that when the letter comes you will show it to me first; at any rate, that you will consult me before you send Miss Chester away."

"Of course," Lady Athelston answered, not at all pleased at the prospect contained in Louisa's last five words; "of course, my dear, as you and Mr. Jelfrey have done it all for me, I shall consult you. The letter is to come to him; and, from all accounts, my dear, he will be more anxious to tell *you* first. Is that true?"

"I am sure, dear Lady Athelston," replied Louisa, blushing and bridling, "he will never think of telling *that* even to me, until you are told."

"Well, well," remarked Lady Athelston, pleasantly, understanding the blushing and bridling, "he is a clever man, my dear, and handsome. Still you ought to have looked higher."

"But, you know," whispered Louisa, repeating credulously one of her supposed lover's deepest falsehoods, "he is only a tutor for a time, and by his own choice."

The tutor, who was a tutor for a time, and by his own choice, had in the mean time found Lina Chester in the blue morning-room, where she had sat alone on her first arrival at High Athelston.

"Miss Chester," he said, leaning with his back against the centre-table, and speaking with a coolness and ease which, to her, seemed the essence of insolence, "I am deputed by Sir Neil Athelston to bid you to return to the ball-room."

"You?" questioned Lina, with a quiet self-possession which showed no sign of fear. "A strange embassador even for him to choose."

"What on earth is the use of your avoiding Sir Neil as you do?" inquired Jelfrey, curiously studying the white figure and the pure face. "It offends you, I suppose, that he is said to be engaged to Miss Castillain. Rubbish!" sneered Jelfrey, excited by the thought. "He will never marry her. Why, I can make you sure of that by a word!"

"Never mind," interposed Lina, with haughty coldness.

"Marjorie Castillain," he said, in a whisper which could not hide the passion of his voice, "is too fond of some one else ever to marry Athelston; does that satisfy you?"

"I was not unsatisfied," remarked Lina, with quiet scorn. "What need have you to tell me this?"

"No need," returned Jelfrey, with a quick sneer; "I don't know why I took the trouble to tell you. I came for another purpose. Miss Chester, I have in my room a letter from the lady who lives at No. 18 Berkeley Square, an answer to one Lady Athelston wrote making inquiries about the young lady who purported to have lived there as governess, and whose very flattering testimonial came from that address. That letter I give to Lady Athelston to-morrow, unless—"

No cry had escaped the girl's white lips; no tears rose to the wide, startled eyes; but the pause which followed his words seemed like an hour of agony to her.

"The writer, Miss Chester," he continued, breaking that awful pause at last, "ignores all knowledge of the Mrs. M'Mullen whose name you gave to Lady Athelston, except that (just before last season) she left her house for a month in the charge of her dress-maker, whose name is M'Mullen, and who lived then in rooms in Conduit Street. She explains this politely. Considering that the letter sent to her house inquiring about a former governess could scarcely be intended for this dress-maker, she thought it best to answer it; for she opened it because the number was affixed; and she could not tell where to send it. When Lady Athelston has read this reply to her letter, she will, I am sure, either wish me to go to London to investigate this, or require you to leave here at once. Either of these things, though, can be prevented by your consenting to do exactly what I propose. Then, if there is any deception of which you fear discovery, you will escape it."

After his cold, calculating speech, Lina's passionate words fell like a cry.

"Why keep up this horrible veil between us even now?—now when you show yourself here to me alone in your own true colors? You know all that Lady Athelston will hear; all that you yourself could find out for her if you went on purpose."

"But what I know need not be told to any one," he said, avoiding unconsciously both the scorn and the fear which flashed from her beautiful eyes. "You know what I told you before, when—well, we need not recall that night. You know how you are to act toward Sir Neil; do you consent to that?"

"Never!" she answered, with slow distress.

"Then there is but one thing you can do," he said, deliberately; "you must go away—away from High Athelston entirely; and your—and that artist fellow in Nether Lane must go too; just as I said before. He must go promptly and quickly."

"I—can not," faltered Lina. "Have you no pity? Where can I go? Where can he go? What harm can he do you—or any one?"

"That must be done—or the letter shown," remarked Jelfrey, folding his arms complacently, and watching the quivering pain of the girl's face.

"I have always known you to be false and cruel," she said, slowly. "I—I would rather he went away—homeless and suspected, as he must be—than that he were false and cruel as you are false and cruel."

"Then he is to go? That's right," Jelfrey said, ironically. "I thought that you, with your peculiar notions, would not stay here under false pretenses, deceiving those who have kindly taken you in."

"Hush!" she cried. "There is no need for you to speak to me of this."

"Then what have you decided?" he asked. "I have no wish to stay here. I only wait to know how I am to act regarding that letter which I hold."

"Must I—must I decide to-night—alone—here—now?"

"I will not say that," he answered, with a gesture of easy concession. "You may think of it, if you like, until to-morrow—until to-morrow night. I will find means of receiving your answer. Leave all that to me. Only be prepared with it to-morrow night; and it must be decisive. It can not, surely, be difficult to choose between two definite plans; either being dismissed with all your antecedents known, or going away freely, still believed in as the old lady has believed in you all along."

"That will do," said Lina, raising her hand involuntarily to stop him. "You have said enough. I will tell you my decision to-morrow."

"Then I will wait," he smiled. "And now, good-night."

These parting words Lina passed by, perhaps not even hearing them; and then she left the pretty little room, which had suddenly grown hateful to her, and crept along the passages toward her own chamber, her face drooped in its unspeakable anguish.

Marjorie Castillain, in her search for Lina, came suddenly upon the small, white-clad figure, and read this unutterable anguish at a glance. Silently and tenderly she took the lonely girl to her warm and loving heart.

"My dear, my dear!" she whispered, and her eyes were wet once more with those big, rare tears of hers which did not fall, "never mind it all, whatever it is. May I come to your room when I can leave them below? Oh! I wish I

dare leave them now! I am so sick, so weary of it all!"

"Please, no—please, not to-night," said Lina, her lips twitching as she tried to speak without a sob. "Oh, I wish I could tell you! Oh, I should like to tell you—after—after to-morrow night!"

"Yes, dear," murmured Marjorie, soothingly, as she kissed the trembling lips again and again; "to-morrow night I shall come and fetch you to Hawkedale, or come and stay with you here, whichever you like, you poor little trembling child! Good-night—good-night."

Marjorie watched her walking on down the lighted corridor — so feebly and lingeringly — then turned and took her own way back to the ball-room, to be the gayest and prettiest figure in the gay and pretty scene.

"I ought not to wonder at any sorrow our engagement may bring (if that is it)," she whispered to herself, while she was still alone, and had no need to hide the sympathy upon her face. "I knew it from the beginning. The only truthful thing Neil did was to give me pearls in my betrothal-ring — pearls and tears, all one — and the only truthful thing I have done through these years has been to wear them."

CHAPTER XXI.

WAITING FOR THE DUSK.

It was the morning after the ball at High Athelston, and Fitz Spendir sat at work in so much of the faint, cold sunshine as could find its way into the little cottage in Nether Lane. He was copying the painting which Colonel Stuart had ordered for Mrs. Esdaile, and Jet was in the garden, raking the soil, and "making the place look neat and nice," as he said. Suddenly the child ran in delightedly.

"Oh, dad!" he cried, "Jack Esdaile's come on his pony to fetch me to go all through the valley to a farm-house on the other side of the hills, and we're to ride in turns. Oh, father, do let me go! And he's got lunch, and we're to be nearly all day."

Fitz was laughing at the excited, unconnected speech, when the bright little face of Jack Esdaile appeared at the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Spendir," he said. "I can not come in because I have my pony here, and he will be spoiling Jet's borders if I leave him. Uncle Alick told me I was to stay here persuading you until you let Jet come with me. I have a holiday from now all day. I'm going to the Low Farm on an errand for mamma. Jet's quite well enough to come now; isn't he, Mr. Spendir? I won't let him get tired. He shall ride just all the way. Why, if I like, you know, I can ride behind him. You will let him come, Mr. Spendir?"

As if Fitz could have said "No," seeing the bright excitement of Jet's delicate face, and hearing the breathless whisper, "Let me go, dad!" As if he could have said "No," even if he had known what the end of that day was to be!

"Run in, laddie," he whispered, stooping with his hand on the child's shoulder, "run in for your jacket."

Jack Esdaile heard the whisper, and with quick tact he turned to his pony.

"If you please, Mr. Spendir, I'll lead him down the garden again, and wait at the gate for Jet. I want to alter the stirrup leathers, too."

"That boy has just the thoughtful delicacy of his uncle," thought Fitz, going into the house again; "what a friend for my lad to have found! Well," he added aloud, as Jet came down the narrow stairs, busily forcing his arms into the tight sleeves of his "best jacket," "well, are you all right now? Bring me the brush."

So first he brushed the child's clothes, slowly and carefully. Then he parted his straight hair afresh, and brushed it up until it looked almost curly, as Jet said. Then he buttoned on a clean collar, and tied his faded tie into a peculiar knot which concealed the soiled parts.

"Capital!" exclaimed the artist, standing back and viewing him. "You look first-rate, Jet; but—but have you no gloves?"

"Father," whispered the child, timidly, "I lost those you bought me for church; I—I couldn't help it."

"There's a pretty state of affairs, then!" said Fitz, screwing up his mouth for a whistle of despair. "I do believe I'd sooner have lost five shillings than heard that. What's to be done now?"

"Perhaps Jack hasn't any on," suggested the delinquent, hopefully.

"Famous idea!" cried the artist, in his genial good-humor. "Let's see—but, cautiously."

So he stepped to the window on tiptoe, and looked out to where the boy (still courteous and patient) stood beside his pony.

"No," whispered Fitz, with a pirouette back into the room, "I believe he has none. Then it doesn't matter about you, does it, Jet?"

"It never mattered about me, dad," returned the boy, in his quiet, old-fashioned way. "I never mind that sort of thing with Jack; he never laughs at me."

Fitz Spendir's eyes darkened a little at this speech. He knew that other children often laughed at his boy, and the thought was a hard one patiently to bear; though few could have told better than himself what the mocking of such lips was worth, and how slow the best and noblest are to pass their judgment on the little ones.

"Father," said Jet, catching this look upon the artist's face, "don't let me go. You'll be lonely, won't you, dad?"

"Not a bit," was the quick, laughing answer; "I shall be all right, and do a splendid day's work, as I shall not have you to hinder me. Mind you enjoy yourself as much as ever you can, for you don't often get a day's pleasure, laddie. Now, run along."

He followed down the garden-path, to watch the boys start.

"Don't be anxious about us, Mr. Spendir," said Jack, as he fixed Jet snugly on the saddle; "I'll take care of Jet; and I've got the lunch here, and we shall have something warm at the farm, and ride home through the valley before it's dark."

"I will meet you there," Fitz said, "and bring Jet home. You will not need to ride round here again, Jack."

"Oh, Mr. Spendir, are you sure you can spare the time?"

"Quite sure; for it will be in the dusk. The walk will be a treat to me. I have a short cut from here to the water-fall, you know, and the round of the road will lengthen your ride greatly."

They said "Good-bye" to each other, and parted; the boys laughing and chatting as they went on toward the town, and the artist thinking gratefully of Jack's uncle and mother as he went back to his solitary task.

Not long had he been at his easel before the cottage-door opened, and Lina Chester entered the room; a bright, glad smile upon her lips for him, whatever fear and pain were in her heart. But the story that she had come to tell must be told, and, though she delayed as long as she could, she told it at last. Told how (though she had stolen that letter, and Marjorie had rescued it, and he had burned it) a similar one had been sent afterward safely and securely; told how the answer to this letter had arrived, what that answer was, and all that Eustace Jelfrey had said to her when he told her that he had it in his possession.

And, as she spoke, Fitz Spendir, noting what sorrow and anxiety had done for the slight form before him, and looking on his own bare room, and cramped, impoverished life, saw two great wrongs far back in the buried years of which neither of them spoke; and all the strong and long-curbed passion of the man rose up in fierce rebellion against the laws of God as well as man. And Lina sat and trembled as she listened to the fierce, burning words, the truth of which she felt that moment almost as he felt it.

"The viper!" sneered Fitz, his lips tight upon his teeth, and his handsome eyes (which an hour before had looked so pitifully and so tenderly upon the child) flaming now in their hot, wrathful scorn. "The viper! When again and again I have known him to be listening and watching, why have I not slain him as I should have slain any other poisonous reptile? Do you call that Heaven's justice? Then let Heaven's justice go, and give me devilry—devilry like his, which prospers and wins its way!"

"But we don't see the end yet," said Lina, softly.

"There won't be long to wait now," he answered, as he walked angrily to and fro in the small room. "The end is hurrying, for I have lost the power at last of resisting what I have resisted so long."

"Of resisting," she said, piteously, appealing to him with both her hands outstretched, and her face full of deep, appealing love, "the sin which would make us his equals! O God, pity us, that we both die before that time!"

The anguish of her face, and the beseeching attitude, went straight to the man's heart, and stirred it with its old patient, brave forbearance.

"Dear," he whispered, the strong brown hands unclenched, and the fierce fire dying in his eyes, "do not look at me so. I was not master of myself just now—as I may not be master of myself when I meet him. But you have brought me to myself again. Sit down. You look so small and frail to-day, while my strength seems like that of half a dozen men. Did you sleep or rest at all last night?"

"How could I, when he had told me this?"

Then, in his great pity and affection, the artist took her close within his arms, and, on his breast, she sobbed until she was quiet in utter weariness. And now he was the comforter, gentle and patient in his strong and quiet courage, lifting a little this cloud which hung above them both.

"Lina, it will be best for every one that we should go; even though by doing so we must show our fear of him."

"Perhaps if *I* went," she said, "you need not. It would be cruel for you to go when you are busy here."

"And being cruel," he answered, in his fitful scorn, "of course it was his first condition. I think that is his chief wish—that I should disappear with all suspicion resting on me. But I never will go, and leave *you* here to bear all that, among them, they have made you bear."

"They can not harm me by that," she said, softly stroking the dark face with her hand, "not if the truth were not known; but it *will* be, it *is* to be, unless we both go."

"And if we go," he said, with rigid lips, "he will know that we go to avoid his threats, and to carry out his dastardly conditions. Now, too," he murmured, his brows drawn low over his restless eyes, "when I was getting on."

"Is it growing into a large sum?" she asked, with a wistful smile.

"Not very rapidly," he answered, with a short, hard laugh; "but still it is growing, and I am strong and able, and the years are long. Yet the sum is great to me. The master over there at High Athelston, with a stroke of his pen, could—"

"Hush! hush!" cried Lina, her eyes fixed upon his lips in breathless pain.

"Why?" he asked. "I was only thinking how *he* could never want a thousand pounds, and how little he valued it; and—how little he could imagine how long it takes to earn and save it."

"My efforts, too, are all foiled now," said Lina, sadly. "I was so glad to think that every year I should earn one hundred pounds, saving always eighty, and sometimes more. What will be the interest of that thousand pounds for—for these five years?"

"Never mind, dear," he cried, hastily, as he bent to kiss the piteous lips; "don't think of it ever again."

"Let us look our future in the face, just once quite steadily," she said, after a little pause. "If you go now, leaving your work half finished, what will Colonel Stuart think; after having always been so kind?"

"Always," Fitz assented, "always; and he will suspect me of the very worst and basest ingratitude of which a man is capable, as well as of countless former sins. Cheerful prospect! Go on."

"And Miss Marjorie Castillain has been kind, too—to both of us."

"Kind!" he echoed, a deep, sudden brightness in his eyes, "rather a rare sort of kindness, hers! Well, never mind; we can still just say, 'God bless her!' when the memory of her brings a thought that's almost like a prayer. I never hoped to be able to do more than that. I can do that as well when I am homeless, as I can now—as well even as if I were master over there, where she is to live. Don't talk about *her* any more. Go on."

"I think if we do go away," mused Lina, "that still the truth may be discovered; I mean, may be told."

"Would he lie so far as that?" exclaimed Fitz, with hasty passion.

"He may. I never can believe him now; and a clue like this, when once begun, is easily followed. What shall we do?"

"You may well ask," he said; "but who can answer? Need we decide now?"

"No, I have not to give the answer until night," she answered, clutching at the thought of even a slight reprieve. "Shall we think of it until evening? I will come here again this evening. I can most easily indeed, for Lady Athelston is spending the day at Burton Park. I shall have nothing to do. Let me come again, and hear what you have thought."

"But," said Fitz, with a sudden recollection, "I have promised to go down the valley at dusk, to meet the boys, and to bring Jet home."

"Is he with Jack Esdaile?" inquired Lina, hurriedly.

"Yes, they have ridden together to the Low Farm, and are coming home by the ravine."

"And you are to meet them?" she said. "Oh, I am so sorry, because Colonel Stuart asked Mr. Jelfrey to go up the valley at dusk, to walk home with Jack. I heard him say it last night at High Athelston, because he should be out this morning, he said, and might forget. Oh, I do so wish you would not go!"

"But I have promised," laughed Fitz, carelessly. "Besides, dear, why should that prevent me?" But, though he asked the question, he knew all that she meant.

"I shall come this afternoon," she whispered, "and, if you are gone, I shall follow you. I know the short way behind these houses to the water-fall. I—I wish you would not go until I have been here and spoken to you."

"I shall, most probably, be back before you come," he answered, cheerily. "I can think things over better and more clearly as I walk alone; the habit has grown upon me, and you know that it was always there. Are you really going now?"

She had risen and moved from the fire, where she had been sitting; but, instead of going to the door, she lingered, looking at that little colored sketch which had so strongly attracted her, on her first visit to the cottage.

The old church-porch, the broken sun-dial, and the one grave by itself in the church-yard path, with the simple name painted so plainly—all these riveted her eyes in a wide, sad gaze; and the artist (who had quietly come up behind her, and was looking on it too) put his arm softly about her, as if something in the picture, or its memories, drew those two together all the closer.

It was a silent embrace, telling much of a strong, protecting love on his side, and a clinging one on hers; and often and often she was glad to recall it.

"Shall we ever find the spot?" she mused, in a slow, wondering tone.

"I mean to find it," he answered, with the quiet, fixed determination of a strong, undaunted man.

And then she said,

"Good-bye. You will think what will be the best; think deeply, won't you—and prayerfully?"

"Yes, if I can," he answered, hesitating over the promise.

So she went; and he, left alone once more, sat down to his painting, as on any other day. At dinner-time he left his easel, and, walking up and down the room a little, wondered what it would be best to do.

Thoughts would not shape themselves properly, so, setting them aside, he brought out the bread-and-cheese and took his dinner. Then he went back to his work, and never paused until his watch-hand pointed to four, when he laid aside his palette and brushes, locked the cottage-door behind him, and walked, swiftly and firmly, as he always walked, over the fields toward the valley.

And so the hours had passed, and this had been to him as any ordinary day, so far as others could see; though Dorcas said afterward that she had noticed for the first time that no sound of whistling or singing came from the artist's room that day. But what did *that* tell of baffled hopes, or the shattering of a life-long ambition?

And Lina went back to High Athelston, wondering how she should spend the long, solitary hours. She knew Sir Neil was at home, and she knew why he staid at home; but she had avoided him so far, and knew how she could do so as she re-entered the house. Once safely in her own room, she would remain there until the dusk, when she would go back to the cottage.

Margaret had put a fire in her room; and, tired and sad, she sat down before it, and began to think. *Began* to think! Had she ceased thinking for one moment through many weary hours? How would Eustace Jelfrey manage to see her to-night? If they decided to leave Highshire, how long a time would he allow them before—? These thoughts, always the same, and bringing no answer, would never do. She drew her hand wearily across her forehead.

"I will leave it to him," she said; "he will see it more clearly than I can. I will do exactly what he says."

Then she sat silent, and tried to think of nothing; until, finding that impossible, she rose and went to a small box that stood beside her bed. From this she took a worn-looking brown book, and, with it in her hand, returned to sit beside the fire. There were no letters on the cover of the book, but on the first page was written,

"*Magdalen's Diary.*"

Lina's eyes were bright and restless as she turned the leaves. Then, finding her place almost in the middle of the book, she began to read. Twice Margaret came to the door to offer to help her, or to replenish the fire, or to bring refreshment; but each time she was gently and quietly denied admission. Sir Neil sent to summon Miss Chester to luncheon, but his message, too, was unheeded. Lying quite still in her low, white chair, she read on in silence, page after page; sometimes going back to re-read, and sometimes passing whole paragraphs unnoticed. Through all the long hours, while she waited for the dusk, she held the brown book in her lap; and followed, with wide, sad, dreamy eyes, the words which she herself had written there in the past years.

And this was what she read:

CHAPTER XXII.

MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

Our last night at home—Gerard's and mine. We have been together to the Scilly Isles to-day, by way of keeping our twenty-first birthday; and in the beautiful abbey gardens we planned and promised for the life we are to lead together. What happy hours we spent in the loveliness and the solitude there! Will such ever come again?

Now that the autumn day is over, we linger with Aunt Jessie as long as we can, round the great fire in the front kitchen; hardly hearing a sound of the noisy gusts of wind that shake the old laburnums outside the wide window, and rattle their branches against the panes. Hardly a sound, because we are listening with all our ears and hearts to Aunt Jessie's low, subdued voice, as she tells us (for the first time to-night) the story of our lives—my twin brother Gerard's and mine. It is one of the rare nights that grandfather spends from home, so rare that I can only remember five or six of them through all my childhood and girlhood. I don't know what brings the talk round to the very question which Gerard and I have so often wondered over, and so often wanted to hear answered; I suppose we drift into it from talking of grandfather, and of our going away to-morrow from the old Cornish home.

Thinking it all over again now, alone in my room, I recall, as if I saw it still, Aunt Jessie's tired brown face, with the love and the gentleness creeping into her eyes, every now and then, as they meet Gerard's through the story of wrong which he is hearing for the first time, and which may well stir to its depths a warm, proud, generous heart like his. Not but what Aunt Jessie's eyes always do soften a little when they rest on Gerard, however cold and hard they may be to meet mine. But I will say no word to-night of her indifference to me—no, not a word on this last night. In the dim future, which I can not see, who can tell whether her love may not seem to me a vanished blessing? At any rate, I will think now only of her care for the orphan children, and her real, real love for one of them. And, oh! I hope that when the old farm knows us no more, her memory, even of me, may be tender; what her memory of Gerard will be, I know full well.

Aunt Jessie is not our aunt exactly, though we always call her so. She is grandfather's sister; so that she is, in reality, our great-aunt. But that does not make any difference. She has been all that we have ever known of aunt, grandmother—even mother. But, ah! not all that we *shall* know of mother. I think—and Gerard thinks, I know; for we often talk of it, we two, in the quiet summer twilights, and the long winter evenings—that some day beyond the Golden Gates we shall know her. Oh! we shall know her—Gerard and I—no fear but that we shall know our own mother!

The last night! There is something sad in the thought now that it has come upon us, though we have been looking forward to it for so long. I suppose there always will be something sad about every last time, however bright the other beginning that may lie beyond. It fills my eyes with tears even to write the words, though my life has not been a full or a happy life in the old farm here. But I said I would not write of that.

To-night I know a reason for grandfather's stern and cruel-seeming neglect of us; I know a reason for Aunt Jessie's love for Gerard and indifference to me; and many things are plainer to me.

I always thought that the reason she did not care to have me with her, either to help or keep her company, was that I never was clever in the farm-work, never quick to understand it, or strong to perform it; and I used to wish she had not sent me to the rectory, to study there, because it caused me to be still less fit for my post here. Then, she always liked household work, and I never could. Perhaps the feeling has been wrong; I have thought so, and struggled against it, but I have never been able to overcome it.

It has been much the same, too, with Gerard, only he is so different from me, that he would never shrink from any duty, however hard or uncongenial it might be to him—*never*. I know that never through the years to come shall I change this thought. I know that whatever paths lay before him, he would know instinctively, by reason of his clear, undeviating sense of honesty, in which his own straightforward course of duty lay, and that nothing would have power to turn him from it—no hardship, no hard work, no repulse. Oh, Gerard, my twin brother, how I wish I had your bright courage, and your trustful bravery, to help me, too, to walk uprightly in this new and untried path which lies before us!

We have always known that we were to leave Tresean when we were grown up, and could make a home for ourselves; so grandfather's decision at last did not take us at all by surprise. What will the home be like, I wonder, that we are to make for ourselves—the home in the far city? Gerard was in London last week, and has, in a sort of way, prepared for us. He has an engagement—a capital one, he calls it, though I can not help hoping he will study painting, of which he is so fond, as well as sing every night; and he has taken rooms for us in a house in Conduit Street; home-like in every way, as he describes them; but, then, I know how to allow for Gerard's pleasant exaggeration when he wishes to cheer me. And there, in the rooms in Conduit Street, I am to "keep house" (if that can be done in lodgings) for Gerard; and I might be wondering what it would be like, only that I know so well it must be a happy life for me, because it will be spent with him.

But, even while I am thinking of this, there is an under-current of thought resting on the pitiful story of our mother's short and saddened life, and I will write it just as Aunt Jessie told it us to-night. We had been talking, as I said before, of our parting, and of grandfather, and Gerard said, in his outspoken way, that grandfather's worst sin was letting his sister work for him as she did, without the reward of loving thanks or tender care.

"But I like it, dear," insisted Aunt Jessie; "I've always lived in the old farm, you know, and always worked in it because I liked the work, as well as because I had it to do—liked it better than any other that could have fallen to me, and much better than doing nothing. So,

Gerard, instead of being relieved, if it were taken from me, I should be lost for occupation, and miserable indeed, dear."

"But it will be heavier still when we are gone, auntie," I said.

"Yes," she answered, absently, her eyes fixed upon Gerard, not upon me; "you lessen it for me much. But never mind; I shall never work harder than my strength will bear, and if I miss your help, it will only make me think of you the more."

This was all said to Gerard, I knew, for she never said those things to me; but it was almost, if not quite, as pleasant for me to hear them said to him as it would have been to have heard them said to me. I knew, as I said before, that I never was much real help to her, though I tried very hard. I think if she had loved me, or encouraged me, I might have succeeded better; but when she dismissed me indifferently, as she often did, how could I help wandering about the farm with only my own solitary dreams (I mean, of course, when Gerard was away) to bear me company? And what wonder that, under all these, there lay always, as there lies to-night, a deep, deep craving for something which my life has never known? Do other girls feel this want, I wonder? Do other girls have to fight passively with this same almost indefinable craving for a something missing from their lives? And through these solitary hours of mine there is always, too, a dreadful shrinking in my heart—a shrinking from the untried future—which unnerves me terribly, and which I always dread Gerard seeing. Ah me! it is strong and cruel within me to-night; and even while I recall his bright, courageous anticipations, I can still only feel that fearful whispering in my own heart, that the future holds some vague, unusual sorrow for me and for Gerard. For Gerard! I could bear it so much more lightly if I did not feel that through our sorrow, however deep, however keen, we must be together to suffer (even though half the world should part us) as (in all happiness that we may ever know) we must be together to rejoice.

But what was I telling of? Our talk to-night. I will not wander off again with that old habit of mine; that is why I think it would be best to give up keeping a diary.

"But, Aunt Jessie," Gerard said, "you will need no reminder of us, I hope, as we shall never need a reminder of you; and the least that grandfather can do, after we are gone, is to make every thing lighter and pleasanter for you. Perhaps he will condescend to do so. Magdalen, I wonder how often he deigns to speak to you or to me during a year."

"Gerard, there is a little excuse for him," Aunt Jessie said; "and I am going, to-night, to tell you what that excuse is."

"I wish, some day," Gerard said, his eyes bright and proud, "I could have grandchildren of my own, if only to have the benefit of profiting by his example. Oh, what a different grandfather one can fancy! Aunt Jessie, I shall never be able to forget how he clouded and deadened every bright and sociable thought I had as a child. Isn't it a woful mistake to fancy that children don't feel the want of sympathy in their elders? But—but I don't suppose I ever shall have children or grandchildren of my own, yet if I *had* the training of a child, my own life would have given me a lesson, Aunt Jessie."

Silly to put down these words, but that they were a part of this last night's talk of ours—so earnest, so very earnest, in spite of all our efforts to be light-hearted.

And then it was that Aunt Jessie told us the story of our mother's life. And I remember it all so clearly and distinctly—as of course I should—that I can write it just as she told it to us, sitting so still beside the great wood fire, and laying now and then her small, hard hand upon my brother's as she quietly and shyly looked up into his handsome face, as if appealing for his patience and his forbearance to his grandfather.

"He was not always stern and moody as he is now, dear, though he always was—even from a boy—silent, and gloomy-tempered. I, who have lived with him all his life, ought to know him, oughtn't I? Yet I don't feel as if I did, even yet—nor as if I ever should. He married as pretty a girl as any in the county, though he was grave enough even then, when he was wooing her—taciturn, as I have so often heard him called. But he won her, and easily, too; for (as you can see now) he was a man in twenty for his face and figure. Like—a little, only a little like—you, Gerard; tall and strong and upright as you are; but it is his child's beauty that you really inherit, dear—his only child's. And she *was* very beautiful, at least in the eyes of all us who loved her. I don't think she was what is called really beautiful—not as"—Aunt Jessie glanced across at me here, for the first time, then was silent for a moment, checking the words that had risen to her lips—"but she was wonderfully pretty, and winning in every way. She had happy eyes, with coaxing laughter in them, and bright, funny words to say to all—just like Gerard; and no wonder, was it, that her mother's heart was wrapped in her, and that her father's pride in her grew with her growth? She had a way of running and singing about the house like a child, as glad and gay as if young brothers and sisters had been growing up with her here in the solitary farm, where hardly another young voice ever echoed, and hardly another young footstep ever trod.

"So, being what she was, was it any wonder that the farm felt like a prison—to the mother I often thought it must have felt like a terrible grave—after she was gone? Never mind how the news first came to us that she had left her home and us—that is not a night which I dare live over again, even after two-and-twenty years. We knew it, and you may fancy what darkness fell upon us all in one sudden moment, a darkness of vague fear, of unwhispered shame, as well as the despair of seeing our idol—and our faith, too, with it—shattered on the hearth which had been all our world.

"He had been in the neighborhood for some weeks, for the sake of the fishing; but he had been no more to us than other gentlemen who would come and stay at the village inn for a week or a month at a time in the fishing season. We all knew him by sight and name, but that was all. We knew nothing, until afterward, of how he haunted the farm after he had once seen your mother, and of how she met him day after day in the little wood beside the river, to hear him plead for a consent which had been given before we knew of this. It is no use my telling you of the parting kisses which she took from us that night, we all unconscious that they were so.

When you are able to think calmly of that time, all those things will seem plain to you.

"After that day her mother went about the farm as if she had been in a dream; a long, gloomy dream, from which now and then she woke with a start, only to fall back into it again when her husband's harsh words had ceased to rouse her. For he was harsh then, Gerard dear; and were there not reason and excuse for him?

"And so a little more than a year went on, and then we noticed a change in your grandmother. She would shake and flush at every sound, would start and give a little involuntary cry if her husband spoke suddenly to her; and she seemed to be forever listening for something apart from any sound in the house which we could hear. I noticed this change for some time before Hiram did, for he was just as slow then to observe the people about him as he is now, though never so hard and cold—I would have you know that of your grandfather, Gerard dear. But I could not win her to tell me why it was. From that night of May's flight—we shortened your mother's name to May, though we have never shortened yours, Magdalen—she seemed to shrink a little both from your grandfather and myself; but ten times more so after there came upon her this change I tell you of.

"One night—it was a late summer night, and the rain was falling and the wind was high—your grandfather came home unexpectedly. He had gone to a cattle-show at a distance, and had arranged to stay all night; and when he came, wet and tired, straight into the kitchen here, where I sat alone at my sewing, I knew in a moment, as plain as if somebody had told me, that there was some trouble behind him which I couldn't see yet.

"'Where's Mary?' he asked, so sharply that the answer would not at first come to my lips.

"'Out in the village,' I said, at last, speaking as naturally as I could. 'She said she was going to see the poor old woman at the toll-house.'

"'Down the river-lane won't lead her to the toll-house,' he said, very roughly. 'There's only the keeper's cottage through the wood, and there's nobody sick to go and see *there*.'

"And then he turned away, and went out again into the rain, in his best clothes and hat, just as he was. So frightened his words had made me—though I couldn't have told why—that I caught up a shawl and followed him. I didn't mind the rain either; I don't remember that I even felt it. I overtook him before he had reached the outer gate, but he didn't speak a word to me—not even to ask me what I wanted—as we walked on together.

"Well, we reached the keeper's cottage, and walked straight in without rapping. I never knew your grandfather to do such a thing before, but he did it without hesitation that night, I following him into the shelter and the fire-light, with my heart beating almost aloud. There, before the fire, on a low rocking-chair, sat your grandmother, and on her lap you lay, Gerard, wide-awake and laughing; while, in a cradle at her feet, Magdalen lay sleeping.

"Shall I ever forget what those first few minutes were like to all of us—to me in my surprise and fear, to Mary in her pitying love and her timidity, to Hiram in his awful anger? We can never, any of us, live through that hour again, thank God!

"Gerard, your mother lay there dying in the room beyond us, and her father would not see her. I need not tell you what he said. With cruel words still ringing from his lips, he went away at last, and I went with him—even in his wrath, it came most naturally to me to follow him—but when he was silent in his room, and all the house was still for the night, I stole back to the keeper's cottage; and the keeper's wife let me quietly in, that I might be with May when she died.

"Gerard, standing there and listening to her words that night, uttered, when she knew that the next she uttered would be before the Judgment-seat, I knew that Sir Gerard Athelston had married her on the morning after that long summer-night journey which they took together while we were searching for her, and crying for her here in the old farm. But how could she prove it, or how could we prove it, when she did not know where they had stopped, and so could tell neither the name of the church where they had been married, nor the name of the clergyman who had married them?

"Sleeping or waking, speaking in gleams of consciousness or in feverish ramblings, she always said the same things. And this was all. They had traveled all that night, fresh horses awaiting them constantly, and his servant taking the hired carriage back, she supposed, from the village where they stopped at last, and where every thing was prepared for their marriage; other servants waiting there with a private traveling-carriage. She never asked the name of the village; in her shyness and bewilderment, she never thought to do this; and months afterward, when Sir Gerard denied the marriage—telling her it was but a sham one to quiet her scruples, and to satisfy her that he had kept his promise to her—she had no proof to bring, as she could never have.

"Poor child! with what anxious, frightened eagerness she would describe all she remembered of the church, again and again; as if we, who had lived here all our lives, could know this village, which lay at the distance of a twelve hours' rapid drive! But still she never ceased reminding us how there was a deep old porch to the church-door, and a bent cross above it; and she told us how, as she came out of its shadow, she stepped upon a low stone grave which bore her own name, and two lines which struck her sadly and drearily then, but had often comforted her since, and which she could never forget. They were only these:

"'*This simple stone shall bear a simple line—*
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine.'

"And that was all she knew of the church, except that from the gate where they stood a few moments waiting for the carriage, Sir Gerard had turned back laughingly to read the time on an old grass-grown sun-dial near the church-yard wall. This was all she could remember, and this, as I said, she told again and again; breaking off sometimes to plead with Sir Gerard to make their marriage known, and sometimes to whisper to her babies, with a pity which it was sad to hear upon a mother's lips, but still always going back to the one subject, and always clear and exact in that.

"It was in the early morning that she died, and then her mother came up here, and pleaded with Hiram to have her brought home with her twin babies. But no; it was of no use. She was buried quietly from the keeper's cottage in the wood, with no name upon her grave—I will show it to you before you leave to-morrow—and, after that, your grandfather allowed that you should come here. Yet, from the day that Mary brought you here until she herself died, some long months afterward, he hardly spoke to her. Her care of you, or her reunion with her daughter, seemed to have put an impassable barrier between them, which neither could throw down; which, perhaps, only death itself could have removed, and so it may have been that death came in pity.

"Gerard, after she was dead, the love that had been buried in anger for so long awoke in all its strength. I heard him moaning over her, and calling to her piteously by all the old pet names; but they could not move her then, as they would have moved her if they had been uttered a few hours sooner.

"After that, we two lived on together here; and you grew up with us, brightening the old house for me, but never for him. The very sight of you always made him more cold and stern; the very sound of your voices deadened his voice, or roused it to harshness and impatience. So the time has gone on, and the year that he has always fixed for you to leave here has come. Gerard, you mustn't harbor ill-will against him, even if, at the last moment, he will not bid 'God bless you.'"

"I can never harbor ill-will against him, save for my mother's sake and Magdalen's," replied Gerard, in such a gentle voice that I knew where his thoughts were lingering. "Aunt Jessie, do you think he has ever tried to find that church?"

"I believe," she answered very low, "that he has been to seek it many times; but he never told me, and I never dared to ask. I'm sure," she added, as if appealing for him to his grandson, "that he longed to believe in his daughter's marriage, but could not. He is too proud to own this, yet I feel quite sure of it. And often I feel how hard it is to wonder at this—putting myself in his place. There was May's word; but, then, for a year he had lost the May who had been his truthful, innocent child; and to doubt *your mother's* truth was not what it would have been, a year before, to doubt the word of his own home-child. Can you understand this?"

"Aunt Jessie, *you* never doubted her truth?" asked Gerard, with proud impatience glancing through all his gentleness.

"Never, dear; but we women are different in our judgments. Then, as I was going to say, besides that, what dependence could he have on the honor of Sir Gerard Athelston? The honor of the Athelstons is held but of slack worth in their own county; and even *we* could hear all this when our child was gone. It is an unprincipled and dissolute race, Gerard, and your father was the worst of all his line."

"Aunt Jessie, is he living still?" I asked.

"No; he married again a week or two after your mother's death—whether he had waited for that, or whether he had not heard of it, I do not know—and died abroad while on his wedding tour. The next heir married his rich young widow. I have heard nothing more of them since then, and I wish to hear nothing more."

"I'm glad he is dead," said Gerard, sternly, "for I never should have thought it harm to harbor ill-will against *him*. What was he like?"

Perhaps it was because the question was so sudden that Aunt Jessie started, and her eyes fell by chance upon me, with an angry look in them, which, for the moment, reminded me of grandfather, as he, too, will look at me sometimes—only very, very rarely will he look at me at all.

"He was—like Magdalen," she said, hesitating over the words.

"No, auntie," put in Gerard, in his bright, quick way, "he never could have really been like Magdalen. No man's face could have been small and fair and exquisitely beautiful like hers."

I write these words because they were Gerard's.

"Yet she is very like him," Aunt Jessie said, quite coldly. "He, too, had pale and delicate features—high-bred, as people used to call them—and he had those grave, gray eyes, which look intensely dark, as Magdalen's do. But, however handsome or high-born the Athelstons are—and they are both, beyond all doubt—it is not a likeness to be proud of, as she knows."

Yes, I knew it then, and I wished with all my heart that I had had a face which should have reminded them of my mother, and not of my father, whom even Gerard, from to-night, must hate so deeply and so honestly.

"I wonder whether any Athelston will ever redeem the name?" he mused, only half aloud.

"I don't think it likely," Aunt Jessie said.

"But," I interrupted, quickly, "Gerard is an Athelston, auntie."

She smiled sadly as she looked into his face.

"Better be only Gerard Dymocke, as they baptized you, dear," she said. "No Athelston will ever acknowledge you as one of them; and—and, as I have said, it is not a name to be proud of."

"But I can raise it," Gerard said, so brightly and confidently that there came a stupid mist of tears between my eyes and his, as I listened. "Aunt Jessie," he added, after a pause, "I must find that village, and the church where our mother was married." And now the loving, ready confidence with which he spoke was good to hear. "Not that I wish it for myself—I have nothing to prove to myself or to Magdalen—but I must find it, for grandfather's sake. If we had not been going to London— But it's best so," he broke off, laying a gentle hand upon my shoulder; "we could not part even for that little time, could we, Lina?" (his old pet name for me). "No; it is far best so."

I knew it was. I know it now as I write in my old room for the last time, spending so the long, wakeful hours which would creep by more slowly still if I were to go to bed. To-morrow we start together out into the new world; and though I know that it may hold great disappointments and great sorrows for us both, yet I can echo Gerard's words, and say it is "Best so."

No. 7 Condait Street.

We are quite settled in our town home now. Being with Gerard makes it really home to me; but at first it seemed very odd, after the old farm. On the floor above us, there lodge two people

who have interested me from the first; a mother and daughter. They are only "simple folk," as Aunt Jessie would say, for the daughter works for her livelihood as a dress-maker in the great houses round here, being wonderfully clever with her needle, and thinking it a great pleasure—the greatest pleasure that could be given her—to earn, for her helpless mother, all the comforts she could wish. Yet it seems to me—I don't know much about London yet—but it seems to me that I may be grateful to have found, in this vast crowd of human hearts and faces (all seeming so far away from each other, even as they jostle in the crush), two simple, loving natures who have already learned to like and trust me. They always say it is "good of me," or "kind of me," to go up to their quiet, busy room; but I think the goodness is *for* me, not *of* me; and I would not wish for a truer comforter than Rachel M'Mullen would be, if I were ever in distress, and had not Gerard. Of course, I mean if I had not Gerard. With him, what other comforter could I ever need?

He seems very fond of his life here, and enjoys his night engagements greatly. Sometimes he takes me with him, but not often, because he either has to leave me alone, or with the one friend who is oftenest with him, and whom I can not like.

I wonder why it is? I try with all my might to like him, because my brother does. I know he is gentlemanly, clever, agreeable, accomplished, and handsome; yet I can not like him. I suppose one has no power over that sort of feeling; at any rate, I have none in this case. I can not like Mr. Jelfrey, and I can not explain why. Of course Gerard only laughs at me, in his gay, pleasant way; but he takes care that I shall not be dependent on Mr. Jelfrey for my evening's amusement when he himself can not be with me.

Gerard's voice improves every day, and is making him quite famous. As he says, it is as good as a fortune to him; and I think, with Mr. Jelfrey, that the pathos of which it is capable is even of more worth to him than its rich quality. Sometimes Eustace Jelfrey says to him, laughingly, when he finds him singing here alone to me, that he ought to husband his resources, as they may desert him. But Gerald never heeds that advice.

"I'm too strong a man," he says, lightly, "to fear my voice failing from weakness, and too cool a man to fear any great emotion taking it from me. So don't let us think of a far hence to-morrow."

"Suppose your voice *were* to leave you, Dymocke," Mr. Jelfrey said, one day, with unaccountable curiosity, "what should you do?"

"Go into the dress-making with Lina," laughed Gerard. "What else could I do, man?"

"You can do something besides sing, surely?" he persisted. "What does he do all day, Miss Dymocke, when he isn't engaged at his profession, or rehearsing, or with me?"

And then I told him, I suppose for the first time, that what my brother was fondest of doing (after singing) was drawing; how, from a boy, he had delighted in it, though he had had no lessons, and was not supposed to have any real talent.

"Yes, I can attempt it," Gerard put in, dropping the conversation, "but that's all. Mine are but poor and lame attempts, Jelfrey, and, indeed, I haven't much time. My genius, old fellow, will leave the Thames unignited. Now I'm ready."

Then Gerard kissed me and went out. I wish he did not go out quite so often with Eustace Jelfrey; but I can not bear to say this to him. It seems as if I fretted at being left; and if he thought that, he would never go. I like him to go—but not with Mr. Jelfrey.

Last night, when they went out together, and I wouldn't go because Eustace Jelfrey went, I grew so lonely here by myself, and so moody, thinking that I ought to help Gerard in the maintenance of this home of ours, and the providing of that better and grander one which he delights to picture, that I determined to go up and sit for a while with Rachel and her mother. And I was soon cheerful again, there in the neat, bright room, with the patient mother who has been helpless for twenty years, and the brave, loving daughter who so gladly works for and waits upon her. I am able sometimes to help Rachel in her work; I was able then, and we sat and sewed together quite merrily. She praises me, and says my taste is worth much to her; but I know she only says it to make me believe that my going so often to them is no hinderance, as I often fear, but a help.

I suppose it was my speaking of her having no help in her work that put it into her head to tell me the sad little history of her adopted child. She had wanted to tell me for some time, she said; and I knew why afterward, when she came to Eustace Jelfrey's name.

Years ago, Rachel and her mother were staying for a month at the sea-side, for the mother's sake (whom the paralysis had just then left helpless); and while they were there a circus entered the town, and the procession rode in state past their door. A little performer, a beautiful fairy-like girl riding alone in the midst, won Rachel's admiration. She smiled at her, and the child smiled in return; and at that very moment the horse shied, and she fell.

Rachel did not quite understand how it was done; but in a few minutes the little girl lay on her bed, and the doctor had forbidden her to be moved. She won Rachel's heart entirely, and Rachel nursed her as willingly, if not so lovingly, as she was nursing her helpless mother. The child's recovery was very tedious, and the circus company were forced to leave the place without her. It was understood that she was to follow; but when she had recovered sufficiently to do so, she pleaded so hard for Rachel to keep her, that Rachel hadn't it in her heart to refuse, though she had many doubts that the girl would fret by-and-by, and chafe at the quiet of her life. But she cried that she never could; and so she staid with Rachel, and was, as she said, her adopted child.

She had been called in the circus, Rosette; but Rachel and her mother always called her Little Rose, even when she grew up. And Rachel says she was just like a little rose, and that they could never bear her to walk alone, even into the adjoining streets and squares where she would work. So Rachel nearly always went too, even though her time was valuable.

But one evening Rose happened to be leaving a house in Hanover Square, when Eustace Jel-

frey was leaving it too, and as it was raining, and she had no umbrella, and he had, he took her home, finding out on the way that she was going to the same place next morning. She laughed over the meeting as she told them of it that night; but Rachel could not. The tears were thick in her eyes when she told me how, from that night, he wooed their little Rose; how he married her; then let her come home to them just to bid them good-bye, on condition that she should then drop all connection with them.

And she had done so. Rachel has never seen her since, and that happened five years ago. She thinks she shall never see her again.

She sometimes meets Mr. Jelfrey, and asks about her; but he never deigns her a reply, only passes her with a bow. He does not know that Rachel lodges now above us. I wonder whether he would come here so often as he does, if he *did* know. I shall tell Gerard of this when I have a good opportunity; I'm sure he ought to know.

I wonder whether the poor, pretty child to whom Rachel was so kind had any living relations in the world. Rachel says she used to talk about a mother whom she dimly remembered, but she did not even know that mother's name, and all that she possessed which could possibly lead to identification was an old gilded locket, with a twist of hair on either side, and under one, which was evidently a woman's hair, was written "Dorcas," and under the other, a man's short curl, was written "Jessie." That was all, and how could that ever lead to the discovery of the girl's parentage?

Rachel's little story set me wondering. Is there any one now in the wide world, recalling longingly, and searching vainly for, the pretty child who was so grateful to those who rescued her from the life she could not bear? Is there any one who would grieve to think of her as Eustace Jelfrey's wife; and would rather feel that the bright-faced child they had lost was living even now that Life above, in which they can join her, than that she lives (a woman with a woman's cares) a life here in which none of those, even who love her best, can participate? Ah me! how terribly, terribly lonely must be the life of a neglected or an unloved wife; because, if she is true and brave, she herself shuts out all sympathy.

It was after Rachel had told me this that I took courage to ask her what I have been longing to ask for some time—whether, among those she worked for, she knows any one who wants a daily governess, and would be at all likely to engage me. She advised me to give up the idea, as I guessed she would; but I overruled all her objections, and then she could tell me that a lady in Upper Brook Street, to whose house she often goes to sew, is anxious, as she knows, to meet with some one who would go for a few hours every morning to read with her only daughter, who is too delicate for constant or hard study.

I was so glad to hear all this; and this morning I called on Mrs. Esdaile. Even without a testimonial she engaged me—I suppose she would have been more particular if I had been going to live in the house—and then, after it was all decided, I told Gerard; for I knew he would stop me if I let him know before. As it was, he seemed very much vexed at first; but he got to laugh over it at last, as I did; and we were discussing it quite merrily, when Mr. Jelfrey came in and took his own share in the talk, as usual.

He told us that Mr. Esdaile is one of the richest merchants in London; that my pupil, Clara, is his only daughter, and that his son is living in Valparaiso with his wife and one little boy, who will inherit immense wealth. He, too, asserted that it would not be right for me to go alone to and fro even this short distance; and Gerard gravely said that he should always take and fetch me.

So it ended all right, and in a few days I begin my new duties, and shall be very glad.

I told Gerard to-night of Rachel's adopted child, and he heard me very silently; man-like, he did not interrupt me even to give utterance to any wrathful words against Eustace Jelfrey. He says, in his warm, generous way, that he will find her out if she is alive; and I know he never says those things without meaning them. But how can he do this? I remind him of the many things he has given himself to find out and put right.

"I have my life before me," he says, laughing; "wait and see."

I have been for a whole term at my daily duties in Upper Brook Street, and to-day I have left off for a month's holiday. I like Clara Esdaile very much, and the teaching is not at all difficult to me; yet how glad I was to think of the holiday, and how proud I was to bring home to Gerard my first earnings! He did so laugh when I showed him Mr. Esdaile's check; and he told me to have it framed, for that it could not possibly be spent like an every-day sum of money.

"Besides," he said, "I shall be jealous, dear, if you spend it for any thing which my earnings can buy you."

So I laughed then, for this first check of mine has always been destined for a present to Gerard, who is generous to me, and who will not let me think that the money which I earn is for any thing but extra and totally unnecessary amusements.

While we were joking about this check, Mr. Jelfrey came in, unannounced as usual, and he joined in the merriment.

"It may be awkward for you if you wish to spend it at once and personally," he said, with thoughtfulness. "Shall I change it for you?"

I was glad, and accepted the offer at once, though Gerard still laughed, and said that such a valuable curiosity as that check never ought to be changed. So Mr. Jelfrey cashed it for me, and to-morrow morning I shall go to buy Gerard's present. As I came to bed, I went in and told Rachel of my check, and she looked sorry that I had let Eustace Jelfrey have it. I wonder why.

The holidays are over, and I begin work again to-morrow. I am not sorry to do so, though Gerard is strangely anxious—gravely anxious now, not laughingly so, as he was before—that I should give up teaching Clara any more. Gerard is more prosperous than he has been at all. He has an increase of engagements, and an increase

of fame; but I think the chief reason of his having more money, which still he always wishes to spend on me, is that he is seldom with Eustace Jelfrey now. Mr. Jelfrey comes here almost as he used to do, and is even gayer, I think, than he used to be; but somehow I can not help fancying that Gerard is much less gay.

Sometimes he is even moody and impatient with me—Gerard, who, all his life, had been so brightly happy; so dauntlessly happy through every cold repulse and disappointment of our old life. I never ask him whether he has any sorrow in which I can not share, partly because I dread the idea too much even to utter it, partly because I could not bear to see his face pale suddenly as I saw it pale a few days ago, when for a moment he misunderstood a question I asked him, and fancied it such a question as this. Perhaps in a few days' time he will be my own bright, loving Gerard once again.

Gerard was later than I had ever known him to be, and I sat wondering and wondering. I could not go up to Rachel, though I longed for the sound of some unharassed voice, and the sight of an unanxious face. I could not go, for I dreaded her seeing my own frightened face, and asking me questions which I could not answer. Oh, how I listened for Gerard's footstep on the pavement below! I felt—so keenly was I listening—that miles away I could have distinguished his steps upon the flags.

I was standing against the window behind the drawn blind, listening and listening with every power I possessed, when Rachel came quietly into the room. I do not remember her having done so before, and I am sure I looked surprised; though I was vexed afterward that I had done so. She came to ask me to go and sit with them, she said, but I could see that she had other words in her heart, though they would not rise to her lips—other thoughts, perhaps, which I can understand better now. I told her I could not go; though, when she asked me why, I had no words to explain.

"Mother is restless to-night, dear," she said, turning regretfully, "or I would stay here a little, for I'm tired of my own company upstairs. Somehow," she went on, nervously, so anxious that I should not think she had sought me out for my own sake, though I knew so well that she had, "mother doesn't care to talk, and the silence seems oppressive to me to-night."

But I could not go with her. So she kissed me and left me, with a few words of comfort, which were, I dare say, commonplace enough; yet of untold help to me just then.

And then the night wore on, hour after hour, until two o'clock had struck. I was not standing at the window then. I was sitting—oh, so tired—before the fire, which I kept burning cheerily all the while for Gerard. My head was buried in my hands, when suddenly a sound roused me. I started up, quivering in every limb, and waited for the sound again. It came, the tapping of some light substance against the window-panes.

I opened the dark curtains, and drew them close behind me to shut in the fire-light; then I raised the blind, opened the window softly, and looked down into the street. At a little distance, a man's figure was sauntering along the pavement. I stood there waiting breathlessly for him to turn again. There was no other figure in all the street, and so I knew that it was for him I waited, and the moments seemed like hours.

"No sound of coming footsteps yet; a long, long, quiet, horrible pause; and then—and then the same dark figure coming slowly back again; walking in the middle of the street, straight on, without looking up, until it stopped exactly opposite the window where I stood.

"Magdalen!"

The call was almost a whisper, but it pierced my ears like a cry of distress.

"Here—here I am, Gerard."

"Hush! Put your hands through and catch what I am going to throw, but don't speak."

I felt that my heart had ceased its beating. I felt that with one cry I must fall down, nerveless and powerless, at Gerard's feet; but his strange, awed whisper gave me a new strength, born of my terrible dread. I held my two hands through the window, and then, for the first time, he looked up—looked up with a long, steadfast, anxious gaze, which I could see, though his face was muffled and the lights were dim. Then he raised his right hand—in which I could see he held something dark—and took aim, slowly and deliberately. A true aim I knew that Gerard could always take, and my hands were ready. A light throw, quick and steady, and my brother's pocket-book was clasped securely in my trembling fingers.

"Shut down the window, quick!" he whispered.

And then he was gone. No explanation; no farewell; no words but those; and Gerard was gone, and all the world was blank and bare and dark to me. Yet, quite cautiously, I could shut the window, draw down the blind, and close the curtains again.

After I had passed back into the fire-light, I opened the pocket-book in tremulous haste, and found it contained only one packet—a packet of money in gold and silver—and on the paper in which the coins were wrapped some written lines, half of them blotted over. I knew the writing to be Gerard's, though it did not look like any which I had ever seen of his before; so I knelt down and read it eagerly and rapidly in the fire-light, my breath hardly stirring as I did so, and the paper shaking in my hand. This was all:

"Magdalen dearest, it will be best for you to leave here as quickly as you can. Can you go back to the farm, or can you—? Oh! how can I advise? I dare only leave it to your own guileless nature, and trust you to our God. I shall dare every thing to leave you this. I dare even the terrible chance of making you a forced witness against your brother. My darling, escape that if you can. In the hope that you have done so, I must live till Heaven grants me news of you. Nothing can save me, at the dock, Lina, if I once reach it. The forged check was offered by me. Will any jury hesitate? Only you, in all the world, will believe in my innocence. A month ago—"

But the remaining words were blotted out, and I could not stay even to try to decipher them. I seemed to know what they would be if I could see them; and did *I* need to be told of Gerard's innocence?

There were no farewell words and no signa-

ture; but what need of them for me? I hid the paper in my breast, close and secure; then I dressed, swiftly and silently, and for one moment crept into Rachel's room.

She was sleeping beside her mother, quiet and peaceful, and a wicked envy came over me as I gazed into her face. I left a light kiss on her cheek, and then raised my head slowly and stole from the room. I had caught sight of my own face once in the glass, and it had frightened me even more than the other sight that frightened me to-night. It was always white and small, and almost always anxious-looking; but now my eyes were wide and burning, and my face was weird in its pallor.

I think my footfall made no sound at all, as I stole down the stairs. The outer door had been left unbolted for Gerard, so I drew back the latch steadily and noiselessly, and left the house. The door was fast again behind me, and I was out in the sleeping street alone in the night and the solitude.

Oh, what a longing I had to find Gerard! Oh, how I prayed I might overtake him by chance! for I knew, by an incomprehensible instinct, that I must not seek him. Was he near me in the gloom? Was he near me in the great loneliness?

Praying breathlessly that I might find him; then breaking off to pray that I might *not* find him if it would be less safe for him; then, crying to myself, "What shall I do?" I went on. Shrinking into the deepest gloom that the streets held, and trembling so that often I had to stop to keep myself from falling, I went on to find a hiding-place; sobbing always, noiselessly and tearlessly, for Gerard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

At home at the old farm once more; but, oh, how different it is without Gerard! I used to think it gloomy always, but never guessed what it could be without my brother. Three days I have been here; three weary, interminable days. Can I have many more to bear, with this awful doubt and anxiety about Gerard?

Grandfather has not spoken to me since I came, and even Aunt Jessie avoids me; so I wander alone through the short wintry days, and sit alone in the dark in my own room through the long hours of the winter evenings, shrinking from the light in the rooms below, as I feel that I must shrink from the light for evermore.

Oh, if I could but hear of Gerard! If I could but know where he is, that I might just be with him in my thoughts! Sometimes I try to speak of him to Aunt Jessie, but she always turns the subject aside with a shudder. Still I know, through all, that she does not think her favorite guilty of this great crime.

I see by the papers that the police are searching for him. They came here on the very first morning, Aunt Jessie says, so surely they will not come again. Yet she seems as if she ever expected them. Oh, if I did but know that he was safe!—if I could only feel as sure that he is safe as I feel sure that he is innocent!

And so, hour after hour, I wander where he and I used to wander together. I have tried to go into the old outhouse in that dismal hollow near the cliffs, just because, when we were very little, we used to hide there from grandfather, when he was unusually stern. But it is kept locked now, and I dare not ask for the key, though I know there is no necessity for locking up the wretched old place.

Last night, in the clear moonlight, I strolled there—in my restlessness I am perpetually strolling somewhere—and, as I could not go in, I stood leaning against the door, looking at the sad, moonlit sea, and wondering (as I never ceased to wonder) where Gerard can be; wondering, too, whether I shall be summoned to tell all that I know of his flight, and whether he lets me know so little on purpose to make that horrible task a little less horrible for me.

As I stood there, in the wide moonlight silence, I fancied a sound reached me from the empty building behind; a sound like nothing so much as a woman's stifled sobbing. I spoke, and waited, and tried the door, and waited again, and called to ask if any help was wanted. But I felt all the time that the sound must have been in my imagination only, for the hush of the night was unbroken now, and the old barn silent as a vault.

I went back to the house, fearing that my constant dread and suspense were affecting my brain. Aunt Jessie must have gone to bed; but this morning I told her. It seems as if (though I can bear in silence my one all-absorbing sorrow) I can not bear these trifling doubts and uncertainties. Do others ever feel so, I wonder, when one great, overwhelming grief has swallowed up every joy or hope that they have ever known or dreamed of?

But I never expected Aunt Jessie to be so angry with me as she was, or to speak so scornfully and tremulously of my unhealthy fancies, sternly ordering me to keep silence on such subjects.

"Once throw suspicion on the house," she said, "and no servant will stop with us. It is a tumble-down, gloomy old place enough as it is, without your bringing ridiculous stories of ghosts to make the girls avoid it."

So I said no more to Aunt Jessie, and I have not been down to the old barn again.

I wish I might sleep to-night; but how can I? The moment I lie down, it seems as if the thoughts that had been coming singly through the day all start up to crowd round me at once, and grow gigantic, and burn into the darkness. And my eyes get wide and hot, and the lids ache and will not close, and my head tosses from side to side and feels like lead.

Ah, me! the night is worst of all!

Where is Gerard? Oh, Gerard, how my heart cries for you in its anguish!

And I wonder where is the false friend who committed the sin. I know he committed it, though I can not read those blotted lines which may tell me. But I know full well whose was the real sin.

Midnight, and the house so still! I never noticed until now how different is the stillness of a happy, guiltless house from one in which shame and sorrow brood. Once more I will try to rest.

It was of no use, I could not sleep, I repeated all the hymns I knew; I counted a thousand;

I tried to think of nothing; but, after it all, sleep was as far from my eyelids as if they had never known, and never again could know, its sweet relief. And so, before the first dim vestige of the dawn appeared, I was leaning from the window, watching for it with tired, hungering eyes.

Slowly there grew out of the silence the sound of wheels; slow, heavy wheels, in that part of the yard which I could see from my window—I mean which I could have seen if there had been light. At first I wondered a little, but then I remembered that I had last night heard grandfather tell Aunt Jessie to have a man and cart sent into the town, as soon as it was daylight, for tiles.

I had been so long unaccustomed to these old sounds, I thought with a sigh, that *that* was why I had begun so suddenly to wonder about these lagging wheels. But while I leaned there, still idly looking where the sound was, some one came into the yard with a lantern, and I saw by its light that this was Aunt Jessie.

Then my eyes grew eager indeed. Aunt Jessie there in the yard before daylight, with a lantern in her hand, and a black shawl muffled about her bent gray head! I watched with quickened breath, for I connected this at once—as I connected every thing beyond the regular routine of daily duties—with Gerard.

Ah! well might I connect this with him, for Aunt Jessie had only stood one minute beside the horse, when Gerard himself came up to her, from the gloomy hollow by the cliffs. I could not see him until he came within the light of her lantern, but I heard his step, and knew it. And then I watched—oh, with such feverish pain and excitement, and dread and jealousy! If he would but take me with him! If he had only thought it would be safe to take me with him, what could have stayed me from joining him now?

But I clenched my hands upon the window-sill, and quite silently watched him, knowing he was going away from me. Oh, if I could only have been Aunt Jessie for those few moments, to kiss his sad face, and to feel his arms about me! But—far away, cold, and alone—I could only watch him go.

He was disguised as a carter, and he wore an old servant's hat slouched down over his face; but, for all that, I knew him in an instant through the disguise, as I had known his step in the darkness.

I saw Aunt Jessie meet him with her hands stretched out, for she had put down the lantern on the edge of the empty cart, and I saw him kiss her just as he used to kiss her in the old days. With a quick throb at my heart, that was more like joy than any thing I had known for long days, I felt that Gerard could never have kissed her *so* if there had been the shadow of guilt between them.

Then I saw her take up his hands, bend her gray head over them in the light of the candle, which already burned low in the lantern socket, and then speak to him anxiously. I saw my brother stoop and rub the wet soil on his hands, with actually a smile upon his face, then take the whip, turn the horse by the rein, and leave the yard slowly. That was all I saw or heard; but I know how Gerard is making his escape. And, somehow it seems easier to me now to pray for his safety.

After our early breakfast this morning, I heard Aunt Jessie tell the wagoner to go to Penzance and bring the cart back with the tiles.

"Your master sent it in early," she said, "and you'll find it where you always stop. Go in at once; and you need not say any thing about it afterward."

She little guessed how I understood this order. She watched him out of sight, her eyes keen and eager, then she drew a long breath of relief, and re-entered the house. And all my heart went out to meet her, in gratitude for her love of Gerard.

Later on in the morning, grandfather was called out—he is growing more and more infirm, and sits for hours together now in his arm-chair—to speak to two men who had come about a horse he had to sell. He went to the stable with them, and on round the farm, they evidently tempting him to take them on. Aunt Jessie and I, standing at the wide window, watched them. She had a startled fear upon her face, and, for the first time I ever could remember such a thing, she clung to me as if I were a little comfort to her.

"Are you afraid, Aunt Jessie," I whispered, "are you afraid that they are here to search for *him?*"

"Hush!" she cried, in quick fear. "They are come to see the young horse."

But I knew why her hold upon my arm grew tighter. Yes, they were detectives, and they had all the buildings opened and examined before they left the farm. Oh, if they had only come yesterday, how terrible it would have been! Strange that I forgot to hide from them myself, until it was too late. I think the sound of grandfather's raised, fierce tones took all sense and power from me.

"Come *here* to search for the forger!" he cried, raising his stick in the short-lived, savage strength which his wrath gave him. "Do you think I harbor criminals *here?* He would be too cunning to come to me, for he knows I'd be the first to give him up—the very first, the very first! Come here!" he reiterated, shrilly, "not he, the thief!—he knows me too well. I should give him up to you with my own hand; I should strike him myself, old and feeble as I am. I would never have had the law changed; I would have hanged every forger under heaven! Come *here?* He daren't!"

And then he turned to me, and spoke to me just such savage words as he had spoken of Gerard. Of course the men then knew who I was; and so I am to go and tell in public all I know of Gerard.

All I know! Will it be crime in me to hold back any of the truth? Have I, as grandfather said to me to-night—and they were the first words he had uttered to me since my return—been helping him in crime? I shall never come back here after I have been to tell of Gerard. It would not do for me to come; even Aunt Jessie said so; and, if she had not, how could I have lived upon his bounty after those cruel words he said of me and Gerard to-day before them all?

I answered all the questions they put to me, no more, no less; but it seemed as if nothing could serve Gerard's cause. He had in his possession the check which Eustace Jelfrey had changed for me; having bought it back, poor Gerard! to

keep for my sake; and he had, a week afterward, cashed that other check for one thousand pounds. One thousand pounds! As if Gerard ever could have had such a sum, and I not know!

I told of Eustace Jelfrey, and appealed to have him examined. But he came from the preliminary inquiry unsuspected—a man exonerated from all shadow of crime. He had been a friend of Gerard Dymocke's, he said, and had once changed a check for his sister, but that check had been bought back from him by Dymocke, the very first time they were alone together afterward. About the other check he knew nothing at all, but, during the three weeks that followed the date when it had been cashed, he had noticed that Gerard Dymocke was unusually well supplied with money, and that he was unusually excited, with moody fits of depression alternating with this excitement, as his sister could testify. I suppose I could testify it, at least they seemed to take for granted that I had done so.

And thus, by some means, Eustace Jelfrey left the examination an unblamed man, and I a criminal in my own miserable thoughts, as Gerard was a criminal in the thoughts of all those who had been about me. I wonder whether, if we had had one single friend in all the city who would and could have exerted himself on our behalf, things would have been left to look just as they did look?

I am with Rachel now in the old room which is so painfully familiar to me—with Rachel only, for a few days ago she woke one morning to find her mother lying dead beside her. The shock to Rachel has left her quite deaf, though still just her own patient, tender self. She would not let me tell her of my sorrows, but she told me of hers as only those can tell of sorrow who know the joys that lie beyond; and as I listened, I grew a little braver and a little more patient.

All the hope is over now. Gerard, in spite of his disguise and occupation, has been taken. The words look like other words when they are written; yet to think what they mean! Some men in Penzance, who wondered about him during the few minutes he stopped with the cart, suspected and betrayed him, sending the police on his track—my poor, solitary, hunted brother! But I have lived through that time, and I can not dare to recall it yet.

Mr. Esdaile's son, who has come home from America in consequence of his father's sudden death, prosecuted with a vigor which every one called just, but which I called merciless and cruel. Again both Eustace Jelfrey and I were examined; but, after it all, there was the verdict uttered, for which the way had been prepared.

Gerard had changed the forged check; Gerard had had possession of the first, of which the forged one had been an exact copy, except that it had been made payable to Mr. Dymocke's order, instead of Miss Dymocke's; and Gerard had been caught attempting to make his escape in disguise. Gerard could deny nothing of this, and we could pay for no one to plead for him; so the trial was soon over, and he was sentenced to transportation for eight years.

Ah, how soon the words are written that mean an endless parting, an everlasting disgrace; a blight upon our lives which nothing can ever wipe away! If we meet again, we shall be old and worn and heart-sick. But I am not old and worn and heart-sick even to-night, while my life lies blank before me, with the terrible blankness of a storm-tossed sea?

I try to think of Gerard as he was at the farm, with the careless independence on his face, and always the coaxing gentleness in his eyes. I try to think of him as he was in London with me, when his gay, tender care and love made the life so pleasant for me. I try to fancy that I hear his voice as he sings to a thousand breathless listeners, with just the quiet ease with which he sings to me alone. I try to fancy that I see him at his easel, whistling softly as he works, and breaking off now and then to show me what he does, or to cheer me with a merry jest. But I can not think of him so. I can only picture him as he sat in the cell at Newgate. And my hard, dry eyes—to which the tears, I think, can never come again—must see him always so.

Ever since—since I came to London, I have been trying to meet with an engagement; for I must earn a home of my own now; and what am I fit to do but teach? Perhaps the unnecessary education which was given me by our rector's wish will be of service to me now. If not, what is there left for me to do?

Rachel wants me to stay with her, but how could I let her work for me? True, I might help her, but my help would not be worth what she would give me. We have talked over all my plans together, she and I, and I have decided to spend the money Gerard gave me on that last dreadful night in seeking an engagement in which I may be able to earn enough to allow me to put something away toward—toward that sum which I feel that we owe to Mr. Esdaile. No matter where the money went, one thing I must always feel, that Gerard and I owe that sum to Clara's brother. One thousand pounds! How can such a sum ever be repaid? Yet that thought can not prevent the duty still being ours to save it.

Clara is married now, and has gone to live at a distance. Poor child! was it a blow to her to find that her father died insolvent? But I don't think she would grieve at that, in the greater loss of both her parents within a year of each other; and I dare say her husband now loves her tenderly, and will make up for all. He is the brother of her brother's wife, and I remember how lovingly she used to speak of "Adelaide."

Well, our paths—which ran together for a little time—are wide apart now, and may never cross again. Clara was always loving and kind to me, and, even through this miserable time, has tried to comfort and to cheer me. Can I remember her all my life save with deep gratitude? She gave me a letter when she saw me last, which, she gently said, might be of service to me if I wished to teach again! That is just Clara's delicate way of speaking. I know it will be of every use to me. At least I know that without such a letter I might try in vain to win what I want. To-morrow I hope to begin in earnest.

I wonder whether many governesses have as hard work in seeking an engagement as I have had? I hope not, for the teaching is hard enough when it comes, without having these humiliations and difficulties in obtaining it. I can not tell them all, and, indeed, I would not

like to do so if I could; but I must tell about to-day, because it is to be the last day.

It began with as dreary a disappointment as need be. When I first began to try for an engagement, I sent my name, and a fee of five shillings, to a governess-agency office; and as they said they had the names of many ladies "on their books," I expected to receive quite a choice of addresses. But I waited in vain. Except one mistress of a small school, who wished for an assistant teacher, at a salary of fifteen pounds a year, I heard of none of the ladies whose names were "on the books." So I gave that idea up in despair, and put an advertisement in the *Times*. I wonder whether any author's opening chapters ever cost him more thought than the wording of that advertisement cost me?

For three or four days no answer came, but to-day I have had two. We would not open them until breakfast was over, Rachel and I, but put them in the middle of the table, and feasted our eyes upon them. Then afterward, sitting close to Rachel, where she could read over me, as she could not hear me, I took the first and opened it.

No need to read it, either I or Rachel. It was only a printed circular from the very agency to which I had applied, offering the advertiser any engagement she might desire (having many of all kinds "on their books"), in return for a fee of five shillings. I crushed that up and burned it, trying to laugh into Rachel's sympathizing eyes, and took up the other letter.

This was just such a one, to all appearance, as I had been longing for, and my hands shook as they opened it.

Yes, it was a lady's letter, but what a different one from what I had expected when I began to read! It was from a girl like myself, who had long been trying to obtain teaching, and who had failed again and again, as I had failed. She had spent all she had, she told me with pitiful candor, in advertising, and entering the agency offices, and going about from place to place to hold interviews. And now she wrote to ask me whether, if I had any answers to my advertisement of which I did not care to make use, I would kindly give them to her.

Oh, how sad it was! Yet Rachel laughed. She said she could not help it, thinking of the answers which I *had* had; but certainly it was not a very merry laugh.

Those were my two letters, and I prepared to go out with a heavy disappointment at my heart. I had seen the advertisement of a lady in Holloway, and I went there with hope more dead within me than it had ever been before. The house was the private residence of a Jew jeweler, and every thing about the place was shine and glitter, as if he liked to see his stock about him here, as well as in the City.

A sleepy, indolent lady sat and questioned me, evidently going through a ready-prepared catechism; but the brisk little master of the house had blurted out his one all-important question almost before I was seated. What salary did I expect? After I had told him, he interrupted his wife's catechism again and again to ask me to "lower my figure." He did not mean that my five feet were too many for his great house, but that my forty pounds' demand was too much for his large purse.

I did lower it, so weary was I of trying and failing. Then they asked me to play. I played one of Beethoven's sonatas, wondering to myself, as I did so, whether it would not have been wiser to play a galop, fast and floridly.

"Pretty well," said the lady of the house, languidly, as I rose; "but I prefer something classical."

I could not venture to answer, and so stupidly had my thoughts wandered to the music, that I was but dimly aware of all she was enforcing upon me.

I could understand that she was willing to engage me to instruct her "young ladies," and that she expected me to undertake every thing, ranging from thorough bass, efficiently ("a part of every lady's education now," she said), to fashionable fancy-work, three languages, painting, and dancing included.

I was dimly aware that I promised to do all this, and that the little father of the "young ladies" made another appeal to me then to "lower my figure," but that his wife whispered to him that I was "very low," and he had better let it rest. Truly I did feel very low then, in this glitter which was not gold.

And so I was engaged; and I begin my duties next week. Mrs. Raphael kept Clara Esdaile's letter. Perhaps that is usual, but I did so hope she would give it back to me, as I could see that it satisfied her entirely. I had not read it myself, for I knew it was not for my eyes that Clara had written it.

Four whole years it is since last I sat writing in this room of Rachel's. Four years of hard, dull work, of unacknowledged service; four years of real heart-loneliness. Well, it is over now, and I have other work, and another home once more to seek; feeling so tired, even before I begin. But I must not mind; it has to be done, and perhaps this will be the last time. There can surely never be another such a cruel ending as there has been to this four years' task of mine.

I never shall know how they found out all about Gerard and myself. I never shall know any thing distinctly about it, except how their reproaches and their scoffings stabbed me. If they would only have sent me away quietly, I should not have minded, for I have been teaching myself always to be prepared for that; but, oh! it was hard to bear the scorn and derision of —such as those.

Mrs. Raphael wrote at once to Clara's husband—Clara died three years ago—telling him that his dead wife had been deceitful and untrue; saying just what such women *do* say when they let their malice go uncurbed. Was not that an unnecessary insult, to him as well as to me? But I will not write another word about them.

I am here now, with my life to begin again, and the one letter, which was my only help before, is mine no more. Mrs. Raphael tore it to atoms, and burned it in her anger, sneering because a cry escaped me as it blazed. Hard as I tried to suppress that cry, it started from my lips in spite of me.

I can only search the papers now, in the hope that I may one day see some engagement at a distance for which I may apply; and how closely I search them, sitting here alone!

Rachel is living for this month at a house in Berkeley Square. The family being out of town, and the woman who has before been left in charge having proved dishonest, they have asked Rachel to stay there until the season begins.

I go to her every day, and we sit together sewing through the evening, but I am alone here at the old rooms until then. She never comes to me; she says the walk, short as it is, does me good, and she is sure to be right. So I go, and she brings me back, and we walk as slowly as we can, and cheer each other, and notice how the evenings are lengthening.

And so that day is over, and to-morrow the papers come, and it begins all over again.

What a strange thing it is to be expecting one certain letter on which all one's future hangs! My future, indeed—my long, long future—seems to hang upon the answer which will come from Highshire, and which may come now by any post. Is it any wonder that I watch for the hour so eagerly? And yet, looking back upon my deceit, is it any wonder that I watch for it with pain?

This is how it was. I saw the advertisement, and in a moment my heart began to beat with a quick, wild hope. One hundred pounds a year, simply to be companion to a lady.

I felt a strange, incomprehensible reliance on my own power, and I answered it at once; I could not bear the delay of an hour, though I knew I should keep the letter open to take to Rachel. I did not write much—I almost think my heart was too full—but an answer came back to me, expressing satisfaction with all I had said, and asking for my reference.

Then I knew I had written to Lady Athelston, and my heart failed me. Could I go to live so in my father's house?

All that day I kept the letter hidden in my breast, and had not courage to show it to Rachel. But it was all told afterward, and then Rachel made her plan. I was to write to Lady Athelston, referring her to "Mrs. M'Mullen, No. 18 Berkeley Square." This address would sound well; the letter would reach Rachel straightforwardly, and she would answer it.

She did—writing as pretty and lady-like a letter as any inhabitant of the Square could do—and for the answer to that letter I am waiting now. I can not work, or eat, or sleep.

Is it right to have accepted a situation with Lady Athelston? She was Sir Gerard's widow, married to him for just one month; and her son now—not his son, though, oh no, not his—is the baronet of High Athelston. I have never written the names before to-day, since that night, nearly five years ago, when Aunt Jessie told us our mother's story.

Suppose—but why think of these things now? It can not be wrong for me to go. No, it can not be wrong for me to go.

I felt that I would gratefully accept any thing that brought me money which I could save; then, how could I resist the temptation of that offer of one hundred pounds a year? Through all the very most hopeful time of my trying, I never fancied I could earn that. Eighty pounds a year I shall be able to put away toward paying that terrible debt of Gerard's and mine. Four years are gone—half the time of his absence; and through those years I have been able to save so little.

How long they have seemed! Yet now that they are over, here I am, waiting for my fate in Rachel's quiet room, just as I was waiting then.

And how have those four years passed with others? With Rachel, evenly, busily, and patiently; of that I am sure, though through all that time she has never, for one hour, ceased to miss her mother, and to hope—against hope—that she should see her adopted child again. She never has done so; nor has she seen Eustace Jelfrey since Gerard's trial.

At the old farm grandfather lives on alone. When—only by chance—I heard of Aunt Jessie's death, I wrote to ask him if he would see me. Twice I wrote, for I fancied my first letter might not have reached him; but I never had an answer. I wish he had written to me, even if only to tell me that he would not see me.

I don't know what put it into my head this evening to show Rachel that little note Gerard threw into my hands on the night he went away. I think I must have taken it to her just because I was so tired of talking of that other letter which we are expecting; or perhaps only because my thoughts were so full of Gerard. Now I am very, very glad I took it; for, between us, we have managed to read most of the blotted words. It took hours to do it; but I think we have read them rightly now. This is what we make them out to be:

"A month ago he told me a specious lie. He told me that Mr. Esdaile was lending him a sum of money just for a few weeks, in which time he should inherit a sum of five thousand pounds. But he said he was so afraid of the fact of his having borrowed money reaching the ears of the dying old woman who had made a will in his favor, that Mr. Esdaile had himself proposed drawing the check for Jelfrey in the name of a friend.

"I believed this lie, just as he said it. I know now that I was mad and blind; but he had a wonderful influence over me, and I never suspected. I offered the check he gave me, firmly believing it to be Mr. Esdaile's own. From the time the knowledge dawned upon me I was miserable, only praying him to restore the money, or to free me from my oath of silence. He could do neither yet, he told me, entreating my forbearance just for a little longer. But I have no written proof of this, and what is my word worth against the facts? Nothing will save me; but, before God, I am innocent."

"Oh, Rachel!" I cried, when it seemed plain to us, "why did he blot it? I could have told this at the trial; I could have told the judge the truth."

"Perhaps his own impulse was the wisest, my dear."

"But why?" I cried. "He would not have written it, if it had not been true."

"He crossed the words out for some reason," Rachel said, very pityingly; "it must have been to prevent your having any knowledge of the transaction, and so guard against your testimony being necessary."

"Then, why did he write them at all?"

"He wrote them instinctively, dear, no doubt," she said, "in his desire for you to know the truth."

"Then, why did he not tear them off?" I moaned, holding the letter tight in my clasped hands.

"Don't you see that on the opposite side of the sheet is written what he does really want you to read? Perhaps he had no more paper."

And then—just hearing those few commonplace words which told of his helplessness—the tears, that are so seldom in my eyes now, rushed to them; and I sobbed in Rachel's arms until I had not strength left me to go back; so she put me to sleep in her own bed, just as she might have put a little child.

To-morrow I leave here. Once more I am starting on a new path. Is it wrong and untrustful to wonder where it will lead? Oh! I will try so hard to do my duty; and perhaps, as God is always pitiful, this home will not be closed against me as others have been. Yet the old haunting presentiment is still with me, and I can not feel that the sorrow of my life and Gerard's can be taken away for long years to come, even if ever.

Oh! I hope it is right (at least, not wrong) for me to be going to High Athelston, tempted only by that offer of one hundred pounds salary. So much of that I shall be able to save for Gerard!

Is all love of money real avarice? If so, what an almost universal sin it must be! I was thinking to-night, as I came home with Rachel, of that last evening at home when Gerard told Aunt Jessie he would redeem his name. Poor Gerard!—poor Gerard! If I could only know what he does in that hard life of his—so far away from me—that I might follow him all the more closely, day by day, in my thoughts! Four years more, and he will be free; and through that time I shall be helping him. There, that shall be my last thought to-night—almost a glad one.

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE DUSK.

THE chill November shadows were creeping in upon Lina, when she closed the book at last, and slowly rose with it in her hand. Her face was pained in its white stillness, and her eyes had a dreamy sorrow in them which it was sad to see, as she locked up the book again, and, standing by the window, looked out far off among the hills.

"Now it is time to go to Gerard," she thought, a quiet patience struggling into her beautiful eyes. "Then, after I have seen him, the way will lie clear before me. I feel so old and tired now to begin it all again—alone. Ah! if only he might think it safe for me to go with him."

Once more, noiselessly and unobserved in her dark dress, Lina crept down to the west door, then through the park and out into the lane, where the dusk deepened fast among the arched trees.

Dorcas Cheere, standing just within her cottage-door and preparing to lock herself in, saw the girl walk up the garden-path, and waited a moment to enjoy the opportunity of letting out a little superfluous viciousness.

"He's out," she snapped, coming a step forward, as Lina tapped softly at the artist's door; "and a blessed thing it is for some of us when he *is* out."

"Has he been gone long?" asked Lina, timidly.

"Not a bit too long," returned Dorcas, jerking out the words, "considering how he goes on when he's here. It makes one frightened of being alone in one's house, to see him come to his door and talk to any begging vagabond that chooses to try him. If he hasn't money to send his boy to school, he oughtn't to have money to give *them*. There was one here just as he was going out, and he must turn back, forsooth! to get him money—a skulking ticket-of-leave man, I'll be bound! I keep my door locked, for it's more likely to be my things they're after than his—as he hasn't any."

But Dorcas, sharply as she spoke, had eyes to see the deathly pallor which crept to Lina's very lips at her words.

"You'd better come in and rest a bit, Miss Chester," she said, modifying her tone a little.

But Lina, faltering her thanks, turned away, and, following the winding field-path behind the cottages, came presently out into the valley, where the shadows glided swift and dim.

No sign of Gerard yet; and the small dark figure hurried on in that great solitude among the hills, which echoed so drearily the solitude of her heart. No sign of Gerard yet; and the shadows came on and wrapped themselves about her, chilling her until she shivered as we shiver when some awful unknown evil nears us. No sign of Gerard yet, and she dared not call. Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, she searched the whole expanse, with a great dread in her wide and desolate eyes; but there was no sign of Gerard yet.

At last, upon the narrow path beyond the water-fall, she saw a group of figures coming toward her, and her heart leaped with relief and thankfulness. It was some moments still before she could recognize them, and then the fear crept slowly back—a greater fear than it had been before. The two boys were together on Jack Esdaile's pony, and beside them rode Louisa Castillain, who had joined them higher up the valley, because she knew who had been asked to meet them. And there was no one else.

Slowly Lina went on toward the path on which they rode. Beyond this path, and above it, lay the silent tarn in the deep shadow, and beside this tarn—almost close beside it—two men had met upon the narrow footway which ran so near its treacherous waters; and the words that left their lips were those hot words of fierce, ungovernable rage which can be rarely either heard or uttered a second time in any man's life.

The two horses came on. Lina heard a shout of recognition from the lips of the boys on the pony, and she knew that they, too, could see her brother and Eustace Jelfrey. She knew Miss Castillain's eyes took in all the scene; yet Lina thought she saw nothing in all the world but the two men who stood there, strong and defiant; knowing nothing of those who watched them, knowing only that they had met in the solitude, and that strength and cowardice, revenge and hatred, justice and injustice, would not rest with words alone—even such words as those.

Lina started forward, trembling helplessly;

one dread only filling her heart and urging her steps. Gerard knew nothing of the mine beneath the water. To Gerard this was only a shallow mountain lake. Could she reach him in time?

Her steps were weak and nerveless, as if she were trying to run in a dream. Louisa Castillain drew up her horse as the small, dark figure passed across the bridle-road. There was still the slight ascent to climb; to Lina it seemed like a terrific mountain in her way, while her steps faltered in their haste and fear.

The two men, with flashing eyes and ringing words of hate, had met in a close and savage embrace; and had not seen her. A few more steps —only a few more: slow and tedious, but only a few more! Before half of these few steps were taken, Lina had fallen to the ground as if the unseen hand of death had smitten her in an instant; for the wide, watching eyes had seen the end; then closed in sudden blindness.

Lina had seen how the man who had been wronged fought with the man who for years had wronged him, and how, with a fierce and frantic strength, he had flung him back into the water whose secret he did not know, and then had left the spot; walking quite slowly in the opposite direction, but still never seeing her. And other eyes had seen the end too. Louisa Castillain had seen how the man whom nobody knew and nobody cared for fought with the man she loved; and how, with a murderous strength, he had hurled him into the water, which meant death, and then had turned away deliberately, because the deed was done.

And the boys had seen how the man who had always had pleasant, merry words for both, and womanly care for one, fought with the man from whom both shrunk with an instinctive antipathy. And even *they* knew, as they clung tremblingly to each other, that, in this dusk among the hills to-day, an awful deed had been committed, of which they knew the name, though the horror of its meaning had never entered into the heart of either; and now it seemed as if a voice were whispering it to them again and again, in this new and terrible experience.

And Louisa Castillain, too, as she galloped wildly down the valley, felt this one word whispered about her, and echoing from hill to hill.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOUISA'S TIDINGS.

The shabby phaeton, which was the only vehicle Marjorie Castillain was allowed to drive, stood at the post-office door, half-way down the steep street of Churchill.

Marjorie had no idea that her custom was valued by Mr. Johnson Mathers, or that her visits were pleasant to him; she thought far too lowly of herself, and far too meanly of her financial resources, to imagine either the one or the other; but certain it is that, since he had helped her on the day she went to him with her first request, she had made as many errands to the shop as she could, and avoided, in that delicate thoughtfulness which recognized the debt of gratitude, the same to the postmaster as to the highest gentleman in the land, allowing any of her trivial orders to be included in Louisa's, when she sent up to a London stationer. And Mr. Mathers instinctively understood all this, and it made him value more the genial, gentle brightness of the girl who always had been his favorite (if his smallest) customer.

The pleasant "good-afternoon" had been spoken, and Marjorie was passing through the door which he held open, when Sir Neil Athelston, on the opposite side of the road, caught sight of her, and crossed.

"Alone, Marjorie?" he asked, as they shook hands. The words sounded careless enough, but the young baronet's eyes were unusually intent as he asked the question.

"Yes, alone," she answered, lightly; "why not? Louie has ridden Tristram up the valley, and will ride back with Jack Esdaile. Louie adores Jack Esdaile."

"*Erratum*—read the initials reversed," put in Neil, coolly. "But, Marjorie," he added, in a tone so unconsciously anxious that Marjorie guessed in a moment at the motive of his question, "tell me where you have been, and who has been with you all this day. You told me at the ball last night that you would come to High Athelston to-day."

"And I intend to do so, Neil," replied Marjorie, her voice catching the anxiety of his. "Where are you going now?"

"To the rectory. I have been deluded into some appointment with our two active magistrates, Jorden and Stuart, and I suppose, unnecessary as I may be, I must not fail to be there to meet them."

"Of course not," laughed Marjorie, "being high-sheriff. What an awe-inspiring meeting, Neil—two magistrates and a sheriff! Shall I come, self-invited, and introduce a little counter-element?"

"I wish you would," he answered, absently, little guessing how unheeded her presence was to be when she *did* come. "But the fact is, Marjorie, I thought you had Miss Chester with you. My mother is at Burton, and so I thought that, as you are always so good to Miss Chester, you would have taken her out, or called to see her, or done something to make this leisure day a kind of holiday to her."

"But you must have known (seeing her at home) that she was not with me."

And Marjorie, a little frightened—she hardly knew why, except that she was always prepared for sorrowful tidings of Lina—spoke far more earnestly than she wot of.

"But I have not seen her to-day," the young man said. "Martin found out that she was in her room all morning, but she could not have staid there until I left at dusk—could she, Marjorie?"

"Hardly," said Marjorie, tersely. "Neil, I will walk on with you. Shall I tell James to keep the phaeton here to take us back?"

"Not necessary," Neil answered, readily, by no means relishing the idea of driving the ancient Hawkedale quadruped. "My dog-cart is to follow me to the rectory. I enjoyed the walk into the town, but don't care for it back again. Let me drive you, Marjorie, and send James home."

She did as he bid her, and they turned and walked up the street together, many eyes following the handsome young couple, whose marriage-

day would not be long in coming now, and would be a holiday for Churchill.

"Will you come into the formidable rectory study, then, Marjorie," Sir Neil inquired, "and make out a case to divert us?"

"To give you something to do? The talented young sheriff has had no opportunity yet for displaying his ideas of justice."

"Churchill is such a stupidly cautious and exemplary spot," he answered, still with the absent tone in his voice. "Our magistrates never have a case worth hearing. Can't you bring us one?"

"I could take papa up," mused Marjorie, "for robbing me of every luxury; but I don't think of any thing definite against— Neil," she added, suddenly breaking off in her forced jest, "is there any *reason* for Miss Chester keeping her own room to-day?"

"Reason?" he echoed, astonished. "Why, Marjorie, what reason could she have to-day more than on any other day?"

"I don't know," ruminated Marjorie, "but one never knows what may have been disc— may have happened in one's absence; and so—and so, at any rate, I am at liberty to ask," she concluded, with a forced laugh.

"No," Neil answered, wondering now at her earnestness, "nothing has happened; indeed, I don't see what could have happened. Have *you* heard any thing, Marjorie?"

She raised her face suddenly to his, a grave wistfulness in her eyes, as she answered, almost solemnly,

"If I *did* hear any thing, Neil, what difference would that make? No friend of mine would ever be doubted in my heart because of any thing I had heard. Neil, should *you* believe evil things of one you had learned to respect? Could you—could you ever do it, Neil?"

He was wondering at her tone, half inclined to smile, when a sudden idea struck him.

"Marjorie, can you be thinking of Miss Chester when you say this?"

"I need not be thinking of any one in particular," she answered, rather quickly. "Look how fast some one is riding down the valley. From the rectory garden, we shall be able to see who it is."

So, in the garden, they turned a little aside among the shrubs, to look over the hedge into the valley. A boy was hastily opening the gate which led from it into the road, and through the opened gate the horse and rider came on without a pause.

"Tristram — Louie — I declare it is Louie!" cried Marjorie, starting a little; "alone, and in haste! I wonder why?"

"Rare event," laughed Neil. "I wonder whether Louisa has ever been in a hurry before in all her life."

Even before the words were all uttered, Louisa had turned Tristram, and drawn him up at the rectory gate. Neil moved forward and opened it for her, but she passed him without a word, cantering on up the sloping drive.

"Stop, Louie, stop!" cried Marjorie, in a breathless voice, subdued in all its eagerness. "Stop one moment, Louie, and tell *us* first."

Neil stood astonished. "Tell what?" he questioned.

But Marjorie did not heed him in her eagerness, and Louisa did not heed either of them. She drew up Tristram at the door, and, dismounting with Neil's ready help, but giving him no word or glance of thanks, passed into the house; her face flushed in odd, fluctuating patches, under her stiff, high hat; her habit sweeping behind her, over the red-and-white tiles. Marjorie followed her; so white and frightened-looking that Neil, seeing her, started forward, and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Marjorie, in Heaven's name, what has frightened you?"

A strange, dreamy smile stirred her lips, but her brows were drawn with pain.

"Louisa will tell us what it is," she said, most sadly, yet sarcastically, too. "Wait a minute, she will tell us. Who could do it better?"

In the hall, just at the study door, Emily Jorden met them.

"I saw you coming," she said, smiling shyly at Sir Neil, and then linking her arm within Marjorie's, in the clinging attitude she loved. "If you are going into the study, I may come too, but I dare not go alone. Papa has some solemn meetings there. Oh, I should be afraid of hearing them! Not that I should be scolded," she added, with her innocent upraised glance past Marjorie's thoughtful face. "Papa never scolds *me*."

"Spoiled child!" returned Sir Neil, recognizing himself appealed to.

"Am I spoiled, Marjorie?" she asked, evidently relishing his pleasant, lazy patronage. "Am I spoiled more than other girls?"

"I don't know," rejoined Marjorie, her face full of another thought. "I suppose it's the same all the world over. All the roses fall to one, all the thorns to another."

They had entered now the long, comfortable room which Mr. Jorden called his study, and he had risen in astonishment from the easy-chair, in which he had sat deliberating with Colonel Stuart, who, leaving the fellow-chair unoccupied, stood upon the rug with his back to the fire.

The rector glanced in surprise from one to another, as his visitors entered unannounced; but the colonel's grave eyes sought rapidly and instinctively for some unusual reason — sought it first in Miss Castillain's face, and last in her sister's. Before they had turned from hers, Louisa had spoken, and made his one faint, unacknowledged doubt into a certainty.

"Mr. Jorden—Colonel Stuart," she cried, approaching them rapidly, "come quick, or send, or do something! Mr. Jelfrey has been killed in the valley, and thrown into the pool—the old mine, you know! I—I saw it done; I saw him murdered!"

She stopped here, overcome by her anger and her grief. But a minute afterward she repeated the words with sudden strength and heat, "I saw him murdered!"

The unbreathed word among the hills had found at last a voice which would not shrink from uttering it.

"Miss Castillain," said Colonel Stuart, with cold gravity, though the color had rushed even into *his* calm face, "be careful what you say, even here, among friends only; for no single word can be retracted."

"I saw it!" she cried again, in quick, assured eagerness. "Why should I retract true words? I saw him murdered!"

"Is it too late for help?" put in Marjorie. "We have had the boat-house drag at Hawkedale, and it is there now. Please send for it, Mr. Jorden—a man on horseback; and he can leave word for them to bring the little boat. But do have the drag at once!"

Mr. Jorden had his hand on the bell, when Colonel Stuart stopped him.

"Would you object to taking the order to the man yourself?' he said. "Why should we have this presently talked of all over the town, and have a crowd to hinder us, too?"

"I see," the rector assented. "I will not bring the servants in here."

When he returned from speaking to his groom, Louisa was still talking of what she had seen.

"Will he be in time?" asked Marjorie of him, in a voice of intense anxiety.

"If any man could," the rector answered, laying his hand with fatherly tenderness upon her clasped fingers. But I fear it is too late for such help to be of any avail. It must have been either too late or unnecessary even from the moment your sister left the tarn; too late to have saved him if he fell down the shaft; unnecessary if he only slipped into the water around it. He is an excellent swimmer, and would have rescued himself in such a case. Miss Castillain, did you wait at all after the deed was done?"

"No," sobbed Louisa; "I galloped off at once for help. Oh, if it is too late it will be your fault! Why do you stay here?"

"Though all help may be impossible," said Sir Neil, his handsome face as white and perplexed as the faces about him, "we need not waste even these few moments. We are all ready."

"One thing, Miss Castillain," interposed the rector; "did you ride straight and fast from the mine here?"

"I started at once, and never stopped. I saw it all. I saw distinctly the man who did it; so did others."

"You need not tell us yet," put in Colonel Stuart, quietly, as he moved to the door.

"Jack saw it," cried Louisa, in sharp, quick tones, between her sobs, "and," she added, while the colonel's eyes met hers in pained surprise; "and the man's own son saw it—the murderer's own son!"

"What!" cried Sir Neil, with a sudden start, "you don't mean—great Heaven! Louisa, you don't mean that—that *Spendir* has murdered Jelfrey?"

"Who else—who else?" Louisa almost shrieked, in a tone both malevolent and miserable. "I saw him, and the boys saw him, and Miss Chester saw him."

Colonel Stuart, his hand upon the door, stopped as her words reached him, a sudden mist before his eyes. Sir Neil, in the act of rebuttoning his overcoat, started as if the few sharp words had struck him.

From Marjorie's tightened lips a cry of real and bitter pain escaped, which made Neil, in all his haste and agitation, turn with a quick and anxious look of sympathy which was quite new to his indolent eyes. For one instant she laid her hands pleadingly upon his arm, and seemed wishful to speak; but then, with a sudden stinging recollection, she drew them away, and stood back while he passed her in his haste.

Then, out in the hall, she stopped beside Colonel Stuart, the pleading look deepening and saddening her eyes.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you remember how lonely she is, and how young, and how weak, and how—how much more friendless than any of us. Oh! need *her* evidence be called against him?"

"Please God, she is not there," he answered, in the same low tone, smiling a little into the eyes that were so beautiful now in their child-like wistfulness. "I will remember."

Only three words, yet so full of tender sympathy and brave hope, that her heart leaped gratefully within her.

"Oh, make haste, make haste!" sobbed Louisa, hurrying through the hall, her tone so sharp and penetrating that it was the first to rouse the curiosity of the servants.

"Where did you leave her, exactly?" asked Sir Neil, thinking it unnecessary to explain of whom he spoke.

"I don't know whom you mean," stammered Miss Castillain, stubbornly, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Where did you leave Miss Chester?" he said, his raised voice sterner and more abrupt than she had ever heard it before.

"At the tarn, close to it—I think. At any rate, she was there at the time," rejoined Miss Castillain, not so much confused as careless; "I saw her running toward them."

"Them! Do you know that you are implicating Mr. Jelfrey, too?" put in the rector, stopping her. "Don't say any more yet, please, Miss Castillain."

"But Sir Neil asked me about Miss Chester," she sobbed, with renewed tears; "and I tell him I saw her running toward Mr. Spendir as he struck the blow—" her grief had not quite deprived Louisa of her cunning—"and when she saw he had killed him she fainted. How could I wait to see more when I wanted help?"

And then Louisa's sobs seemed to overcome her utterly.

But Neil took no trouble to offer even a soothing word.

"I shall find her," he muttered, with contemptuous lips.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Emily Jorden, weeping bitterly, and clinging to her father's arm. "Will it be too late?"

"Hush!" he said, appeasingly; "let us hope it is all well. It is possible, dear. Ah! thank Heaven! there's Sir Neil's dog-cart coming up the lawn. Go to mamma, my pet; I shall soon be back."

If there had been a hundred lives at stake, the father would have had time for his child's kiss.

"Quick!" cried Sir Neil, springing to his seat, and holding the furs aside for Mr. Jorden to take his place beside him; while the colonel swiftly mounted behind, and, on his own responsibility, told Ridley he would not be wanted. Cautiously Neil held in the fresh, thorough-bred horses, and bent to speak to Marjorie, raising his hat instinctively as he did so.

"You were always her friend, Marjorie," he said. "Be satisfied, dear—I will find her."

"I am coming," she answered, coldly; but he did not hear. His selfish impatience dominating over every other thought, he urged on his horses down the slope; and soon they were ra-

cing over the shadowy turf, Louisa Castillain, who had mounted again, following as rapidly as she could.

"Emily," whispered Marjorie, entreating as Miss Jorden had never heard her entreat before, "lend me your horse and your skirt, will you? Nothing else—I can not wait for any thing else. Fetch the skirt, and I'll saddle the horse myself."

Deftly and rapidly she did it, ran back into the house for a moment to change her skirt, then mounted without assistance, and cantered on, with tightened rein, beside the swollen brook.

Long before the dog-cart reached the tarn, she had left Louisa behind, and she only slackened speed when she saw the three gentlemen standing in the gloom beside the water.

Only those three, she said to herself, with a gasp that sounded like relief. She joined them with a quiet pain upon her face; but the water—growing darker and darker every moment now, as the long November night drew on—held its secret safely. She turned sick and faint as she stood there, for to her heart also was whispered now that one miserable word whose echo must linger for evermore about this spot.

"If he had saved himself," remarked Mr. Jorden, "we should have seen him. I have no further hope of that. There is no trace of his struggling to shore."

"There are traces of a struggle here," said Colonel Stuart, who had been cautiously examining the foot-path which skirted the edge of the water. "There are foot-marks here of more than one."

"Yes," answered his brother magistrate, gravely, "it must have ended with that deadly act. This will be a painful business."

And then there was a short and puzzled silence among them, and not one but wished that he had not been sheriff or magistrate just then.

"I suppose, Sir Neil," Mr. Jorden said at last, "I must first send the police to Mr. Spendir's cottage."

Neil answered moodily that he supposed so. His thoughts hardly followed the rector's words; and Marjorie knew this.

"Neil," she whispered, her sweet voice very low and earnest, "do not go on to-night. Dear Neil, it will be kindest not to seek her."

"Absurd!" he answered, with a gesture of impatience; "she has been frightened, and is alone. Where is your womanly pity?"

"The pity I feel," returned Marjorie, hurt at his tone, but still gently entreating him, "I wish you could understand—oh, I wish you could! Don't seek her, Neil."

But again he spurned her words, in eager, petulant haste.

"Real pity for her I see you can not understand," she said then, coldly. "Go and bring her back here, if you will. You have been cruel to her always; crown it with this last and meanest cruelty."

He hardly seemed to understand what she was saying.

"Must I go to this fellow's cottage before I have my own liberty, Jorden?" he asked, haughtily.

"I should like you to do so. I think we ought," the rector said.

"And we may perhaps see Miss Chester *there*," put in Colonel Stuart, to delay him; "she is very likely to have gone with the boys, either there or to The Anchorage."

But Colonel Stuart knew that Lina Chester's one great effort would be to go as far away from all of them as she could—he knew it even better than Marjorie did, because he knew what would be her reason.

"If we are bound to go, before—before we do any thing else," put in Sir Neil, in his inborn impatience, let us go at once, for Heaven's sake! If you will drive for me, Stuart, I will walk across the field-path to the cottages. I shall be there as soon as you are, and—"

He did not finish the sentence, but they all knew that he went in the hope of meeting or overtaking Lina, in the path which she would be sure to have taken if she had intended to go to the cottages.

In driving through the town the rector was detained again and again; once for quite half an hour by a fellow-clergyman, who had driven from a distance on purpose to see him, and could not be kept in town in the deepening gloom of the evening. Through these hinderances Colonel Stuart waited patiently, rejoicing over each one, and lengthening it as much as possible.

"Had you not better go on, colonel?" Mr. Jorden whispered, as another delay occurred from one of his own curates. "I don't like to show I'm in haste. Sir Neil will have arrived at the cottage already, so that will be all right, and I wish to avoid suspicion."

"Of course—of course," assented the colonel, with remarkable promptness. "Don't hasten, and whatever you do, avoid all appearance of excitement. I don't mind how long I wait for you."

And so it chanced that when at last they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, Sir Neil was at the gate waiting for them; his face to the road, white and angry and perplexed.

"We need not wait," he said, when the horses stopped; "we need none of us wait here."

"Is there no fear of his escaping us?" inquired Mr. Jorden, as Sir Neil still stood, without offering to take his seat.

"No fear," the baronet answered, so decisively that neither of them for a moment questioned his word. "You will come on with me—and dine?" Neil asked, as if his thoughts were far away from the dining, yet as if he dreaded their going back.

"Miss Chester was not at the cottage, then?" inquired Colonel Stuart, asking the question as frankly and genially as he could, when the rector had declined Sir Neil's invitation, on plea of work at home.

"No."

"Then, if you will walk on, Athelston," said the colonel, seeing he wished it, "I will drive back and bring Miss Marjorie to High Athelston."

Neil understood the delicate kindness of this plan, and smiled his thanks, as he shook hands with the rector and turned away.

"What can he have heard or seen in there?" questioned Mr. Jorden, as they turned and drove on down the darkening lane. "Something has perplexed and hurt him—enraged him too. And yet below it all is some other thought which is engrossing him. Can it possibly be anxiety about Miss Chester?"

Colonel Stuart drove on in silence. There was no need to tell how sure he was of this.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TWO ATHELSTONS.

THE water in that tarn among the hills still rippled in widening circles which told so much, and yet so little, when Fitz Spendir (his face set in hard, stern lines, though he was quite cool to all outward seeming) walked on past the waterfall, making—almost unconsciously—a wide circuit before he took the foot-path across the hill to Nether Lane.

He turned the key in the door, and entered his cottage with a listless step. Bare and chill and empty the room looked to him, as he hesitated a moment within the threshold.

"What matter," he muttered, pushing the hair from his sunburned face, "what matter how cheerless? It can hardly look more solitary even when we have left it—for he will be doubly bent upon our leaving now. Poor Jet! Poor laddie! It was almost cruel, after all, to rescue the boy only just to link his life with mine. My life! What a grand problem it has been! Well, I have spoken to that villain to-night for the first time since he taught me, five years ago, how black a man's heart *could* be; taught me other lessons too, good lessons—useful lessons. My God! I dare remember this, and know that it was only into a shallow pond I flung him! Why, the whole ocean could not wash away the blackness of his foul heart; and I only threw him *there*. He, the best swimmer in all Highshire—unless the weight of his mean crimes—"

Fitz—busy now arranging his work—broke off with a laugh, keen and sarcastic, but hardly bitter; there seemed even now to belong no bitterness to the handsome bronzed face and the warm, brave eyes.

"I'm sorry I didn't go on to meet the lad," he thought, bending busily over his pencil; "but, somehow, he went out of my head entirely, and it's no use going back now. He can well take care of himself, poor little fellow; he has had practice enough, at any rate, to keep his hand in. I must have a light, but I can leave the shutters open to guide him."

So, beside the lamp in the unshuttered room, the artist was sitting, intent and occupied, when, from the gloom without, that was not darkness even yet, Sir Neil Athelston came in to him.

At the opening of the door, Fitz had raised his head with a welcoming glance, thinking to see Jet. When his eyes met Sir Neil's, they darkened suddenly and strangely.

"An unexpected honor," he said, looking coolly at the young baronet, and leaning back in his stiff, hard chair. "To what do I owe the charm of this surprise?"

Sir Neil was anxious, evidently anxious, else his face would have illustrated more vividly the haughtiness of the thoughts which stirred within him at the artist's words.

"I wonder you venture to ask," he said; "you are too fresh from your crime to need a reminder of it, and I do not covet the pleasure of recapitulating it."

"I should be glad to know to what crime you refer," put in Fitz, deliberately. "I am accustomed to having crimes laid to my charge, but I like clearness in the accusation. Go on; I have no other objection to offer—merely that one of vagueness in the charge brought against me."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Sir Neil, hotly, "what do you mean by speaking to me so?—you, a murderer! A fellow who ought to be in prison now—who *will* be in prison before an hour is over!"

"Oh, in prison!" echoed Fitz, in a voice whose strange, slow gravity struck on his listener's ear. "Quite a pleasant place, when you're used to it. My lines always *have* fallen in pleasant places though, as somebody says; and so I've learned to expect it. Have you any prospect to hold out to me beyond that general one of a prison, Neil Athelston?"

"I should think you have but one prospect to hold out for yourself," Neil answered, feeling a little at a disadvantage, in spite of his pride and authoritativeness. "Evidence is too strong against you, even for you to hope for life. Four people saw you fling Jelfrey down the shaft of the old mine. Few men care to commit murder in presence of so many witnesses."

Fitz rose quite leisurely, and, leaning against the chimney opposite Sir Neil, gazed at him steadfastly, almost curiously; no sign in face or attitude of the great, cold qualm which almost stilled his heart-beats.

"Life!" he repeated, ironically; "and suppose I do not hope for life. How are you noble distributors of justice going to relieve me of it?"

"These questions are absurd," interposed Sir Neil, growing uncomfortable under the gaze of the clear, dauntless eyes. "You know what the law demands of those who take life; and you know how you have taken life to-day. By Jove! I didn't come to tell you of it, but to have you taken, and—and to—"

Sir Neil Athelston was not doing himself credit in this interview, and he knew it. He had entered the cottage for the purpose of annihilating the murderer, without condescending to lower himself to explain any thing; and here was the murderer questioning him with a manner cool and proud and self-possessed as his own—or more so. Besides that, he had come to ask a question on another subject, or to make some hoped-for discovery; and here he was hesitating over the question, and as far from being able to discover where Lina Chester might be, as he had been out in the darkening valley, where he had sought for her in vain.

"Have I the pleasure of receiving you as an amateur policeman, then?" asked Fitz, calmly.

"We have no need of amateurs in the case," rejoined the young baronet, with sternness. "There will be professional ones here presently."

"Then you may sit there, near the door, keeping your self-imposed guard," remarked Fitz, with a slight, haughty gesture to one—the most distant from the fire—of the three chairs which were all the room contained. Did you bring the handcuffs?"

Neil Athelston was as incapable of sounding the depths of scorn and defiance hidden under these leisurely words as he was of understanding the intense muscular earnestness of the man before him. What could he comprehend of the teachings of a proud, wronged, hunted life like this? How could he fathom a heart that had been bright and brave and hopeful through years of the deepest humiliation which can be suffered under God's wide and merciful heaven?

What had his pampered nature ever had to battle with, that any experience of *his* could bring him near enough to this man to understand any thing in his words beyond their arrogance? But yet he treated them in the wisest way in which a wiser man could have done, for he treated them as if they had not been uttered.

Passing the chair which had been so coolly assigned him he came up to the table on which the artist's block and brushes lay. And now the one only earnest purpose which had ever stirred him gave his face an eagerness which Fitz, from his lounging position opposite, studied with keen intentness.

"Where did Miss Chester go after she left the lake?" he asked. "Tell me that, Spendir; we have no other matter to settle now—you and I."

"We *have* another matter to settle now, you and I," echoed Fitz, contemptuously. "It may just as well be settled here, and now, though I have the satisfaction of being able to look forward to another interview in a larger apartment, and where a more comfortable seat will be at your disposal. The prisoner and the high-sheriff will not need to say much to each other then; though your position there will make no more difference in my valuation of *you*, Neil Athelston, than my position there will make in your valuation of *me*. If you were sheriff of a hundred counties," he went on, his eyes feverishly hot, while Sir Neil hardly comprehended the keenness of the satire of his last words, "you don't suppose I could look upon you, or on any of your house, with any thing but scorn and contempt. *Your* house, mind; I am in no hurry to call it mine. Yet such a fame as mine will be to-morrow, as mine has been now for years, is but a fitting one for the head of such a house."

"I do not understand you," put in Sir Neil, feeling it a trouble to try to do so. "Will you tell me where—"

"*Don't* you understand me?" questioned Fitz, with a slow emphasis. "Well, I will try to make it clear enough for your intellect, if you will kindly assist me by exhibiting some sign upon your face when a gleam of intelligence reaches you. Do you recollect this little sketch? You have seen it before, and I asked you then whether you should recognize the spot if you saw it. Perhaps you never may see it; but *I* shall. In spite of the handcuffs and the dock, I shall have liberty for that. Look at it well; not to criticise it, as you did before, when you bored yourself to death here for an hour, because Miss Chester came—your long pursuit of *her* has been a blacker crime than that which you kindly say will hang me!—but look at it," he resumed, checking his hot words with a strong and violent effort, "to fix it on your mind. In that church was celebrated, and is registered—*is registered*—the marriage of Sir Gerard Athelston and his first wife; the wife whose name was the same as the name upon that grave over which she walked—she and her husband, and the clergyman who had married them—and who lies in her own grave now, suffering no longer from the pain she was made to suffer from one of your noble, upright, truthful race. I shall find that register some day, and then you shall see how well your name and title fit the convict and the murderer. You look astonished! If you had lived *my* life, none of these trifles would astonish you. Perhaps these sins of mine will be new ones among the Athelstons, but no one then will ever speak of them or think of them. The world smiles just the same upon the Athelstons, innocent or guilty. Their sins are not the same as the sins of lower men. I dare say—I dare say," mused Fitz, with the slowest, keenest satire, "that they will elect me high-sheriff then!"

"You are simply insane to talk in this way," interposed Sir Neil, moved by a hundred feelings at once, and hardly comprehending what they were, except that a hope that this guilty man might be wandering in his mind, battled with a fear in which there seemed a strange, truthful strength which he could not define. "You are simply insane to talk so. If your mother imagined—"

"Great heavens! *you* name my mother to me!" cried Fitz, standing upright now upon the hearth, his broad chest heaving, his eyes literally burning in the torture of their passion, his strong hand clenched and bloodless. "Go away from me! Do you stand there and speak to me of these things on purpose to tempt me? My God! how hard it is to keep my—"

"Mr. Spendir," said Sir Neil, in almost a pacific tone, for the violence of the artist's agitation, and the intense effort of the strain he put upon himself, alarmed as well as astonished him, "tell me where Miss Chester is."

"I don't know," returned Fitz, the words almost a whisper in their forced quietness.

"That is not true," blurted out Sir Neil, in his impatience.

"Isn't it?" questioned Fitz, his clenched hands behind him, and his wide, sunburned forehead drawn into countless lines. "Then I begin to think you recognize me as an Athelston; father and son, *they've* been liars for many a generation."

"I think it's more than time the handcuffs were here," said the baronet, savagely; "and I can leave the finding of Miss Chester to the police. They will manage, I dare say, as they will be obliged to find her in time for her to give her evidence at your trial."

The cruel words had not been planned to stab, but there was a little exultation in the baronet's mind when he saw that they did so.

"You have pretended to care for her," Fitz said, an awful pallor on his face, as he curbed his passionate temper, and lowered his hot, fierce tones; "you have seemed to wish to spare her. Now, you could spare her this, and will not."

"I wish to see her," returned Neil, moodily; "and if she should tell me—"

"*She* tell you!" ejaculated Fitz, haughtily. "She will tell you nothing about me; and she is not Athelston enough to utter a falsehood. Listen"—the curbed emotion of the man was almost terrible as he came forward a little, and spoke with angry earnestness—"listen: I will wait here, quiet and tame—ay, as quiet and tame as if I were used to it—for my summons to jail, if you will not seek *her*. You need not fear my escaping; only—only let her escape. In Heaven's name, spare her this!"

"There's no fear of your escaping, in any case, I think," muttered Sir Neil; "you need not make any unnecessary promises about that. Just tell me where Miss Chester is—that's all I want of you."

"You have deigned to admire Miss Chester," said Fitz, with a slow, bitter smile. "It's a pity, isn't it, that the fate of a murderer should be entangled with her fate? Lowering, eh, to the Athelston pride and purity?"

"Tell me where she is," struck in Sir Neil, beginning to fear he should win no answer. "I have no wish to be detained longer."

"And I have no wish to detain you," the artist answered, with a slight, haughty bow. "I would quite as soon have one of the Churchill constables; he would manage the thing better."

"I shall not forget those words. By Jove! I shall not!" exclaimed Sir Neil, losing all command over himself. "You shall rue this—you, whose hands are black with crime!"

"Are they?" Fitz said, leisurely examining his strong brown fingers; "are they? Yes, I see they are blacker than yours. But then—let me see—is it the blackness of the *hands* that signifies most?"

"You evidently know where Miss Chester is," put in Sir Neil, going back to his one most serious idea, "and you can not keep the secret long! I would not advise you to try. All these things will tell against you, you know."

"A thousand things will tell against me," replied Fitz, with bitter coldness; "a hundred memories now will help to drag me to my death."

"But something may be done," interrupted Sir Neil, hoping at last that he might, by soothing means, win the information he wished to obtain. But though the words sounded almost kind, Fitz knew the selfish desire which prompted them.

"Something will be done," he answered, quietly, "and these hundred tongues and memories will help it on. But I can not die until I find that little church; then I can die an Athelston—the first one whom the law has tenderly taken in hand. Are you growing tired now of your voluntary guard over the criminal?" he added, almost laughing. "I should like to see you take a chair and make yourself comfortable, as befits the high sheriff. Excuse my not entertaining you, but I wish to finish this illustration before your friends and followers bring me the handcuffs."

To Sir Neil the simple idea of this man's trying to escape justice seemed absurd, as he watched him seat himself quietly at his work, and immediately become engrossed in it. There was something, under these circumstances, so ludicrous in the idea of his staying there on his fruitless errand, that he walked away from the cottage without another word; and had only reached the gate, when the dog-cart came up, with Mr. Jorden and Colonel Stuart. No wonder that they thought he looked angry and vexed and baffled.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PREPARING FOR ESCAPE.

Alone in his chill and almost fireless room, Fitz Spendir rose and stood before that sketch of which he and Sir Neil had been talking. Long and sadly he gazed upon it, his firm lips shaking as he did so; then, still standing there in the silence, he covered his eyes, as if the sight of it had grown into pain for him. So Jet, entering the room timidly and gravely as he had never entered it before, found him, nearly half an hour afterward.

"I've been to The Anchorage, dad," the child said, nervously, as he approached him. "I—I didn't think where I was going until I saw—and—and—I think Jack's pony went without us knowing."

Fitz had quickly dropped his hand, and now he looked, with a long and questioning gaze, at the little face below him.

"Laddie," he said, in his rich, gentle tones, "what has frightened you?"

"Nothing," the little white lips stammered, in their horror and their great love.

"What have you seen?" the man continued, gently drawing the boy toward him. "Tell me exactly. Don't shrink away from me. Tell me what you saw. I can not hurt you, laddie; you are not afraid of *me?*"

The voice which the lad had always known so prompt and bright and jesting was almost wistful now; and still there came no kiss from the childish lips, and no caresses from the little hands.

"Oh, father!" he cried, piteously, "don't ask me. I can't tell it!"

With a deep, acute pain, Fitz felt how involuntarily the child shrunk from him, and felt, too, how little he could wonder at this, or blame him for it.

"Very well, laddie," he said, with quiet sadness; "I will not ask you to tell me what you saw, because, of course, I know; and I know who saw it as well as you. Let us talk of something else, shall we? Let us think of other things—prepare for other things. Run, laddie, and fetch me all the treasures that you have; for we must take them with us."

Without even asking his favorite question, "Why?" the boy went slowly upstairs, returning presently with a small wooden box in his hands.

"Here they are, dad; do you want them?" he asked, holding the box tightly.

"Not to keep," the artist answered; "only to see what you have got—what you have to cherish when we leave behind us—"

He checked himself, with a smile into the child's inquisitive face.

"Now, you can hold the box. Keep it safe, and I will make discoveries. All right. Open, Sesame!"

Fitz turned over the trifles gently, one by one, smiling a little sadly to see how valueless they were. Not that he told the child this; on the contrary, he handled the things with tenderness, and now and then exclaimed, admiringly,

"There's the jew's-harp; how well I remember buying that! And here's the old baby-rattle; and here's— Ah!"

The cry was slow and full of thought; only that one short word, and Fitz Spendir's eyes were keenly and intently bent on a small piece of gilded jewelry which he held between his fingers—a piece of jewelry, at least, that had been gilded once, but was now in its unmistakably brass under-suit. Breathing quickly, Fitz signed Jet away with the box, and opened the locket.

"I—knew it," he muttered. "I wonder why. I felt so certain of it all in a moment. Ah, what a good thing *this* is for my boy! I need not take

him now. *He* will have a home. I remember the story so well! I wonder whether I should have remembered every word of it as I do, if any one else had told it to me? God bless her! I think I never could forget any of her bright, kind, thoughtful words, even if I had been used to such of late. Jet," he added, aloud, "don't look so astonished, dear lad. Come here and see this. Take it up to the lamp, and describe it to me."

"It is a locket, father," the boy said, in his gentle, practical way, wondering why he must look at it alone there; "I know all about it without looking. There's hair in it on both sides, and names; under one hair there's 'Jessie' written, and under the other there's 'Dorcas.' That's all. And it was mother's, you know, and she told me to keep it. Are you going to do any thing to it, dad?"

"No," replied Fitz, gently. "Take it in your own care, laddie. Now, let us tell stories to each other, like old times."

"Yes," faltered Jet, without the prompt gladness with which in those old times he had always received the idea.

"Shall we make up the fire first?" asked Fitz, rising, and moving toward it with an attempt at his old ease, which failed most pitifully. "What do you think, old fellow? Wouldn't a few sticks brighten it up quickest? I'll light you to fetch them, for we've no time to lose."

"Why no time to lose?" inquired Jet curiously, even suspiciously. "What have we got to do, dad?"

"Many things," laughed Fitz; but the boy, watching him as he lighted the candle in his hand, saw no smile in his eyes. He piled the sticks on the little grate while Jet stood by, open-mouthed.

"Why, dad," he ejaculated at last, when his astonishment found words, "you'll burn enough for a whole week—you'll burn 'em all! We can't light the fire to-morrow."

"No," replied the artist, slowly, his face hidden as the crackling flames leaped about him, "not to-morrow."

"There, dad, leave off," whined Jet, growing fretful because he felt he could not understand things to-night.

"All right, laddie," assented Fitz, taking his own seat in the cheerful fire-light. "Come, are you too big to sit on my knee to-night?"

But the boy, ignoring the invitation, drew another chair up for himself, and took his seat silently and demurely. Fitz Spendir, in his sorrow and heart-loneliness, felt this keenly; but no glance or word told of the pain it gave him. His eyes, warm and pitiful as the boy had ever known them, turned to him as he drew the two chairs close together; his words, genial as the boy had ever known them too, were only these:

"Now, laddie, it's my turn first, I suppose. I'm ready. You must listen all the time, because —because I want you to tell the very same story afterward."

"The same one, dad—why?"

Fitz gently stroked the little face upturned in its surprise. It seemed to-night as if the strong, self-concentrated man longed and craved even for the love and sympathy of the timid, cautious child.

"You will know some time, little one. Never mind any reasons for any thing to-night. Forget that favorite word of yours, 'why,' and listen to me, just as you listen to 'The Arabian Nights' and 'Robinson Crusoe.'"

The wood fire crackled and blazed, and faded and blazed again; and in its fluctuating light they sat, the man's voice low and earnest as he told the little story which the boy was to tell afterward, and to which he listened so breathlessly.

"That's the end," Fitz said, presently. "Now, listen a little longer. Presently—presently," he repeated sadly, for the word had to him the sorrow which belongs to the last time, "you will go in next door, and tell this story to Mrs. Cheere; and then stay to see what she thinks of it. But I don't want you to forget a single word of it; so now tell it to me—just as if I were Mrs. Dorcas herself. Now, then, for the rehearsal."

No question passed the boy's lips. The man's deep, quiet earnestness was infectious, and Jet (his head bent in the fire-light, and his thin fingers tight upon the locket) spoke with his gentle, old-fashioned gravity.

"I shall go in and show this to Mrs. Cheere, and I shall say that there was once a little girl who was stolen from her home in Churchill, and from her mother, and she had this upon her neck, and she kept it always till she died. And she was taken a long way off, and sold to a circus—she thought she was sold, but wasn't sure—and she used to ride and things, and she got very tired of it, and was very unhappy. And so one day she fell down from a high horse, and was hurt, and somebody who was a dress-maker took her home and cured her, and she staid with her, and was quite happy till she was grown up; and she always kept the locket, but couldn't ever find her mother or her old home, because she couldn't remember either of them, except like a far-away sort of dream. And so one day a gentleman said he was very fond of her, and made her marry him, and go away from every body that had loved her, and always been good to her, and taken care of her; and made her live in a house in a lonely part of London, with nobody but him; and soon he got to stay away from her all day, and then he got to stay away all night, and then he got to stay away altogether; and he left her alone and poor, and she had only her little boy (but he didn't know it, 'cos he was only a baby), and then —and then— How am I to say this, dad?"

"As you like, dear laddie."

"And then," resumed the boy, with still the gravity in his eyes and voice, "somebody who had known her cruel husband, and had known that dress-maker who'd loved her, tried and tried to find her out and help her. But he couldn't have time, because he was sent a long way off for eight years. But when half the time was over he came back, and found her out really, just as she was growing more and more dying; and the little boy was with her, and nobody else; and this gentleman staid and helped her as much as he could, only he was as poor as he could be. And when she was dead, he took the little boy with him, and they've lived together ever since. And the locket—"

"Wait, laddie, where is the end? Tell it properly."

"And," the boy said, rising and standing before the artist's chair, "I should say, Mrs. Cheere, the little girl who was stolen was your little girl, and the gentleman who married her, and was so

cruel, was Mr. Jelfrey, and the little boy was me, and the gentleman who was with mother, and knows all about her, and where her grave is—for he chose it—and who has had me with him ever since, is—how shall I call you, father?"

"Not *father* any more, dear lad, I fear," the artist said, bending his dark face upon the little pale, upraised one, "but just what you think of at the moment. The right word is sure to come then from those tender little lips. I can leave it all to you. Now, are you ready to go, and have you the locket?"

"But," argued Jet, "Mrs. Cheere is out now, dad. She was having tea with the housekeeper at The Anchorage when we were there, and she had met Miss Castillain, and had heard—and she came up to Mrs. Esdaile, and—oh! dad—"

The sobs, which had been withheld all the evening, broke out here unrestrainedly at some sudden recollection.

"And she said, I suppose," the artist put in, "that she had heard what had happened, and had been expecting it—and, what else?"

"No; she said," sobbed the child, "that she heard you say you wouldn't think it any sin to kill Mr. Jelfrey. She heard it through the wall, and she'd been frightened ever since, she said; and she said—"

"What?"

"That if ever we deserved a deluge it's now, when such crimes—such crimes, she said, were committed by people that lived under the same roof with innocent people. Oh! dad, I don't want to go to *her!*"

"But, dear," the artist said, quite gently—though the thought bitterly forced its way that it should be *she* whose words could condemn him, and that this child should be the one to tell it—"she will be quite different to you when she has heard that story you are going to tell her. She is your grandmother, you know, and she will love you at once, for her 'little girl's' sake, and very soon for your own. Now put supper, laddie—let's have it together to-night (if there is any) before you go."

With just the deft quietness which belonged to him, the child laid the cloth on the round table; but there was nothing to put upon it then but one small, cold mutton-chop.

"You said this morning that we would call, as we came home, and buy something, dad," the boy said, looking ruefully at his neat but scant preparation.

"Yes, dear; but, strange to say, we're quite at a loss in the morning to know what the evening will bring forth. That's quite enough."

"Then come, please," Jet urged, quietly placing a chair for Fitz.

"I will come and sit down," he said, gently, his dark, sad face brightening involuntarily as Jet, now of his own accord, brought the chairs close up together, "but I've no appetite yet. It's rather early for a grown-up man's supper, isn't it? I hope you're hungry, though, laddie. The pleasantest sight I can have will be to see you eat this chop. Now, dear: 'For what we are going to receive, O Lord, make us thankful. Amen.'"

"But, dad," argued Jet, opening his eyes and dropping his folded hands, as he wonderingly looked up into the artist's face, "if you aren't going to receive any supper, why do you say 'we?'"

"There may be other things coming to us, laddie, besides supper," Fitz answered. "Never mind that, though. Now, here's the crust. You always liked the crust of a loaf, didn't you?"

He watched the boy, who eat slowly and without any relish; and then, when the meal was over, he drew him for a few moments close within his arms, and hid his face upon the little head.

There was an utter silence between them for those few moments—a silence which the boy could only understand completely when, a man himself, he could still distinctly recall this wretched night. Then Fitz opened the back door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage with his own key, for the bolt had not been drawn, and the child went in alone; dressed, as he had been all day, in his best clothes, and holding safely between both hands the little gilded locket. And Fitz watched him to the last minute, his eyes dim; but his lips set firmly as they had not been before since Sir Neil Athelston had left him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FITZ SPENDIR'S JUDGE.

One glance the artist gave round his own room—a brief, cynical, comprehensive glance; then, avoiding touching one single thing which it contained, he unfastened again the door in the back of the cottage, which opened close upon the field-path to the valley; and this path he traversed in rapid silence, until he came close upon that tarn in the hollow.

Far from shunning or avoiding it, he walked up to the brink, and (in the gloom that was awful as deep darkness) stood gazing along the surface, his eyes still dim, his lips still stern and rigid. Then once more he resumed his rapid flight, and never paused again until he reached a village station some four miles from Churchill.

The rain was falling now continuously, and Fitz Spendir's coat and hat were soaked; but he avoided the booking-office and the covered part of the station, and walked slowly to and fro upon the unsheltered platform. How long would it be before the London train came? Would there be time for him to be stopped? Even if the train were punctual, there was still half an hour to wait. He had better have lingered longer, he thought, in that heavy gloom among the hills.

Half an hour! He would walk backward and forward just one hundred times—surely that would bring the hour near! He walked as slowly as he could, the beating rain unheeded, and then he glanced through the office-window at the station clock. A quarter of an hour nearer! One hundred times more. Would the pursuing feet have reached him then, and ended it all? Or would the train be in time? The second hundred were finished; and then, Fitz, breathing rather hard and fast, but with no attempt at concealing his face, entered the ticket-office, and bought a second-class ticket to London.

"You've just escaped a disappointment, sir," the station-master observed. "It's only since this month began that the train has stopped here; last month you couldn't have gone."

Fitz smiled as he pocketed his ticket.

"I'm lucky, then," he said, coolly; and the man little guessed what meaning the words bore.

"Is the train generally pretty punctual?" he inquired.

"Always pretty punctual, sir," was the answer. "There's a goods train to run through first, and then it generally follows as punctual as may be."

"Thanks."

Fitz had now turned to leave the office; but another passenger, muffled up and laden, was entering, and so he had to stand a minute until the door-way was free again. Standing so—still never hiding his face, but looking out clearly on every thing about him—his eyes fell upon certain printed words that hung upon the wall, and they rested there upon one line, which seemed to stand alone amidst the other lines, clearer, plainer, more distinct:

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

Out on the platform once more, standing away from the light, in the drenching rain; and looking eagerly into the distant darkness for the lamps, these words repeated themselves to Fitz again and again.

At last the glaring red eyes met his watching ones, and an engine dashed up to him; past him; away into the darkness behind; and the goods train had left the station clear for the one for which he so breathlessly waited.

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

In the very blackness that encircled him, the words shone out; not in letters of light or of fire, only just as he had seen them, black letters on the white paper; simple, forcible, truthful, but with no outward reason to make them so, the force, the truth, and the simplicity lying in the words themselves.

Would the train be in time, or would the pursuing footsteps—? Ah, no, not too late, for here it came; the fiery eyes steadily, swiftly rolling toward him, bringing reseue.

Fitz drew back from the edge of the platform, and moved down again toward the lighted part of the station. It was coming now, close behind him. The whistle had died away in the silence, and the engine's pace was slow and deliberate; yet even now, with escape so close at hand, Fitz saw those words more plainly than aught else:

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

Was he whispering them to himself, or could other voices—

"Almost exact to time, you see, sir," said the porter, opening a carriage-door near Fitz, as the train stopped. "All right here, sir. "It's wet enough standing where you've been."

The carriage-door stood wide open; the other passenger had taken his seat; the engine was getting up its steam again. Beyond lay inscrutable darkness; and, beyond that, safety in the crowd and labyrinth of London. The pursuing footsteps had not been in time. Escape and rescue were here awaiting him. Why should those words delay him?

The man held the door, and waited. Fitz took out a shilling, and put it quietly into his hand. He, at any rate, had helped him, and was willing unconsciously to help him until the fear of detection was passed—perhaps forever. Yet could he fly from judgment if He that judged him was the Lord?

"Quick, sir, please."

And still Fitz hesitated; haunted by the echo of those words at which this man had gazed all day perhaps, seeing no meaning in them.

"Please be quick, sir; there's no cause to stop."

The answer was low and rapid—spoken in an intense and bitter struggle.

"Shut the door; I'm not going."

The London train whirled away into the blackness of the night landscape. The porter stood at the station gate, his lantern raised to see the last of the would-be passenger, who "must surely be mad to have bought a ticket, and been as if he was going to London, till the very last moment, and then turn all at once so suddenly."

And the man he judged so, tired and drenched, took his way, in the rain and darkness, back across the hills, to his own deserted home, there to await the death to which he knew he might be doomed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"JUST SUCH AS HE."

When Fitz Spendir re-entered his cottage, he found the lamp burning, and Colonel Stuart standing beside the fireless grate, evidently awaiting him.

His first sensation was one of extreme pleasure, and his face showed it; but when the words he would have uttered, in this pleasure, rose to his lips, he mistrusted himself, and so the words that passed them had a different meaning and a different tone.

"I expected the police here, Colonel Stuart."

"Never mind the police, Spendir, for these few minutes. I waited, feeling sure you would return. I have been anxious all the evening to come and speak with you, but I could not leave High Athelston before. They are worried and anxious about the absence of Miss Chester. Poor Lady Athelston has been in hysterics, and Miss Marjorie Castillain has had much trouble with her. Sir Neil has gone—to seek Miss Chester, as I fear."

Not a word could Fitz Spendir say in reply to this speech, so kindly spoken.

"I wanted to see you," the colonel added, "that I might tell you how willingly every thing in our power will be done for you. You may rest assured of that, Spendir."

Fitz smiled—a smile that might either have been incredulous or hopeless.

"I promise you," the colonel repeated, earnestly.

"You would not—you *could* not, if you knew," Fitz said.

"I would—I shall, *because* I know," was the prompt, gentle answer.

"How, Colonel Stuart?" inquired the artist, gazing into his face with surprise.

"It would be a long story, if I were to tell you exactly how," returned the colonel. "Even your sister—though she does not guess it—could understand and believe it more readily than you will, because she may remember whom her old pupil, Clara Esdaile, married. You were away at the time, so would hardly know that for one brief year she was my wife. Did you never make

inquiries about my sister when you heard her name—little Jack's name, too?"

"I knew," Fitz said, in a low, hesitating voice, "I knew that it was Mrs. Esdaile's husband who—who prosecuted for his father five years ago."

"Yes," put in the colonel, in his quiet, kindly way, "old Mr. Esdaile's only son. He is in Africa now, or he would have recognized you; his wife had never seen you, so, of course, could not do so. But Clara had known you so well, and, above all, loved your sister so very dearly, that she never believed in your guilt. Is it strange, therefore, that I should have grown to believe what my wife believed, until now the belief is, in reality, a *consciousness* of your innocence? She used to talk to me of your sister Magdalen, and, indeed, of you, until I seemed to know you both. Still, it was only gradually that I recognized you. I had a suspicion even at first; then the suspicion dawned into conviction. Even when Miss Chester came with me here, only a day or two after her arrival in Highshire, I began to fancy what also became a certainty to me afterward. Spendir, have I any need to tell you that this discovery was never breathed to any one but my own sister, and that to her it had grown to be, even then, more than a suspicion? And believe this: day by day, as our knowledge of you grew, it only became more impossible for us to feel that the verdict uttered against you nearly five years ago could have been a just one; and, day by day, as our knowledge of your sister grew, Clara's judgment of her came to be *our* judgment, and the friendship that we were both willing to give her, for Clara's sake, was won from us for her own. Now, Spendir, you will believe that nothing which we *can* do for you will be left undone."

"You are—you always have been—very kind, Colonel Stuart," returned Fitz, his face very still and thoughtful, as it had been all through the colonel's speech; "but—if I understand the fact aright, for even yet it is all vague and unreal to me—it is better for me not to hope. Acquittal will be impossible for me when that former trial of mine is known. But I may hope now for Magdalen; I shall never feel again, after your generous words, that she is so utterly alone and forsaken. Even if I can not thank you for your unexampled goodness to myself, I can thank you for that which you have shown to her. But," he added, rather hurriedly, "I can not let you sit with me to-night, Colonel Stuart, without telling you by what a mere chance you found me here. You waited, you say, confident that I should return; that confidence, at any rate, I have not deserved, for I—had not intended to be here awaiting my fate."

And then Fitz Spendir, in that low, unhurried tone which grows natural to those who live much alone, told of his escape as far as the village station, of the few words he had read there, and of how strangely and deeply those words had sunk into his heart, until it grew impossible to him to follow his original design.

Colonel Stuart sat opposite, listening in silence; his eyes full of a deep sympathy, but never once raised to the artist's face.

When the short, sad story was over, he stretched out his hand to Fitz. He was a cool, middle-aged soldier, yet he would not trust himself to speak just then. For an instant Fitz hesitated, looking wistfully at the outstretched hand.

"I can not resist," he said then, with his low, rich laugh. "It may be the last, as it has been the first, which has sought mine, for—for most of a life-time, counting as time *ought* to be counted. Colonel Stuart, you are not one to regret that you have taken in yours even the stained hand of a murderer?"

"Hush, Spendir!" put in the colonel, in real distress; "that word need not be uttered between us. This would never have occurred if you had known of the old shaft beneath the water."

"No, never; but the deed is done," interposed Fitz. "No ignorance of mine takes from it the horrors of guilt. Possibly at the trial, as you kindly think, they may call it by another name, but it makes no difference to me. I have taken his life—so those who saw us say—that is enough. It is a long thought, and will last me a long time. What else have I to think of, now that my life has stopped? A black curtain has fallen between me and the future; what have I but the past to look at—the near past, and the long past? Though, God knows, there's nothing cheerful there! Guilt there, too—guilt always; and its punishment."

"Not your own guilt," put in the officer, earnestly.

"But what difference has that made?" was the answer, spoken in a passion, which was as short-lived as it was strong and ironical. "What difference has that ever made? There followed the punishment, the isolation, the degradation. Could it have been more, if I had done the deed in the sight of man and God? I've often and often since then *wanted* to commit just such a sin. You look incredulous—in your spotless, unsuspected life, you can no more imagine such feelings than you can imagine the treatment which gives birth to them—yet these vile thoughts have grown horribly familiar to me. I have *wanted* to commit the real sin, because I had borne, and was bearing, its punishment, and because all my life was marred for any good. I knew no worse consequences could have followed the real crime. There were years and years of labor to look forward to, and there was the ban upon my name, which could never be taken away again. Could any thing have added punishment to these? My whole prospect of ever living honored or loved—loved! think of love in such a life as mine!—among my fellow-men, was shattered to atoms. What did it matter where those atoms drifted to? No; *you* can never fancy how easy the real guilt often seemed to me."

"Yes, I can understand," rejoined the colonel; "and I can understand the Loving-kindness which withheld your hand through that time. However black a curtain hides the future from you, Spendir, it can not hide the heaven above."

"But I never thought of that—sometimes I did not even believe it," returned Fitz, the passion of his quick tones softening a little. "It is harder still to think of it now. Where is the mercy that—"

"Spendir," interrupted the colonel, easily and genially turning aside the cynical, unhealthy thoughts which he felt were but natural just now, from this man whose strong sense of justice battled so fiercely with that simple, anxious faith with which he tried to grope through the darkness of his own thoughts, "you have been work-

ing hard and saving carefully through this summer; am I right in my idea of your reason? Are you trying to accumulate that sum which — for which the check was drawn in your name?"

"I *was* trying," returned the young man, pushing the hair from his dark face, with a gesture of such utter weariness and hopelessness that the colonel felt his lips shake as he read in it many unspoken words—"I was trying; but that is over now, like every thing else. What a fool I must have been to have begun such a work with any hope at all! Yet I did. I can laugh now to find how strong and deathless hope must be within a man for it ever to have misled *me*. I did work for that, late and early, happily and hopefully—ay, laughable as it sounds. No work seemed too hard or too heavy for that end. I have saved; but a thousand pounds takes a long, long time to accumulate by the hands of one man, who has no particular talent, and no friends. If my old means of livelihood had not failed me in my need, the task would have been comparatively easy to me. But, as I told you months ago, my voice failed me for singing in public; what wonder that it did, in that time of degradation?"

"Don't let us speak of that time," said the colonel, gently. "I hope you understand that not one farthing of that money will either Adelaide or her husband take; and do you for a moment dream that I would take Clara's share from one who never robbed her of a half-penny? Don't speak of that time again. Perhaps it need not be recalled at all. Perhaps no one will know."

"Not know that I am a ticket-of-leave man! Why, that will be the first thing brought forward at my trial, and will damn me instantly. A ticket-of-leave man — a returned convict! Think of it. Say it over to yourself, and imagine the weight of those few words in a court of justice. You should have heard the horror and rage of my neighbor here, when she fancied a ticket-of-leave man came to our doors to ask for a crust, only to-day. A helpless, crippled old idiot he was; but what did that matter? He was capable of any thing savage or mean or horrible, because he only *might* be a convict with a ticket of leave. He was to be avoided and scouted and spit at, because he only *might* be this horrible thing. Perhaps he was—perhaps he wasn't. What did it matter? The consequences, as far as she went, were all one to him; as the consequences will be all one to me. I didn't care whether he was or not; I'm used to them. I've known them harmless and quiet—actually as if they hadn't done the wrong. I've known them so like men that hadn't been debased, that you wouldn't have discovered them if the irons had been taken away; and I've known them fiends incarnate."

"But the story of these old years may be hushed up," put in Colonel Stuart, gently. "We all have a little power in the county; Sir Neil Athelston has much."

It was because he knew this so well that Fitz Spendir answered, with such quick resentment,

"I don't care to benefit by his unlimited power. *Your* help and sympathy, but—" he added, interrupting himself as if the subject hurt him keenly, "why, in Heaven's name, should help be sought for me? I did that deed to-night. Even if no one had been present to swear I did it, the stain upon my name would condemn me."

"There will be evidence in your favor, too," put in Colonel Stuart.

"Not to weigh for much, even if *you* win it for me (for who else would?). Not to weigh for much against that other evidence. Why, that of my next-door neighbor alone should hang me. Colonel Stuart," he added, laughing his short laugh of nervous strength and hopelessness, "is not it easy to love your neighbor as yourself?"

"How would her evidence injure you, Spendir?"

Then Fitz repeated what Jet had heard her tell Mrs. Esdaile while he was at The Anchorage, and vexed indeed did the colonel look as he listened.

"It would not signify if it stopped there," he muttered, "but she may have repeated the same thing to others. It may have spread all over the town by this time. I would have done any thing to prevent this."

"Don't think of it more, Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, with a change to great gentleness in his voice, "and don't even try to help me, for you must see what a failure any effort would be. I am ready for my trial, ready even for the verdict, as Heaven knows I could not have been in that other trial. But, oh! if you can help my sister," he added, with intense earnestness, "and *will* do it, I shall be grateful always. If I only knew now that she was safe, every thing else would seem almost easy to bear."

"You have no idea where she is, then?"

"Indeed, no. I have not seen her since this morning, when she promised to come here again at dusk. Lady Athelston was out for the day, she said, and her time was her own."

"And she evidently came," said the colonel; "and, as you were away, she followed you to the valley. From the tarn she was lost sight of. I was glad, Spendir, truly glad, for I had been in real fear lest we should find her at High Athelston. She has acted with the deepest wisdom—consciously or unconsciously."

"Thank God!" murmured Fitz.

"Don't be anxious about her," continued Colonel Stuart, kindly. "If she does return, you may rely upon my gladly helping and cheering her in every way I have the power to do. Depend on this through all, Spendir."

"She can hardly miss *my* protection," said Fitz, sadly; "what good has it ever been to her? Yet how differently we had planned—and dreamed of—her life and mine!"

"And, besides my ready, willing help, always at her service," the colonel continued, a little huskily, "you may depend on Miss Castillain's —Miss Marjorie Castillain's. Her deepest sympathy is with your sister—and with you."

"Did she say it?" inquired the young man, his beautiful eyes taking their old warmth, and the dusky color rising in his cheeks.

"Indeed she did," replied the colonel, looking away from his companion, and speaking with a new and great pity in his tones. "I will tell you her own words, Spendir—of course I will, for she spoke them for you; I am only her messenger. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that you have offered to tell me his story, but that I will not listen until he says that he *wishes* me to hear it. Tell him that, not knowing one single word of it, I trust him as implicitly as I trust Lina; and as I *shall* trust her all through her absence. Tell him

I shall never cease trying to help him as far as my little power goes, and shall hope to be his friend, and his sister's friend, all my life. Tell him I never shall think of him except as I've thought of him all through this summer, while I've seen him working always hard and earnestly among us, always brave through ridicule, and uncomplaining through privation. Tell him I shall never rest until I know Lina Chester to be happy and safe; and this because she has, by her own real goodness, won my love, and I can not take it back ever, or let it lie idle and unhelpful. Tell him all this, while I don't know his story or hers, yet while I trust and respect them both entirely. And tell him I never can think of Eustace Jelfrey except as the wicked man I know him—I, best of all, though he can not understand that—and that I do not think him dead.' That was her message, Spendir, and I have remembered every word."

Fitz was standing against the chimney-piece, his face hidden, his chest heaving quickly. Without looking up, the colonel spoke on, following his own thoughts.

"We all know Eustace Jelfrey now too well," he said, "to doubt his power of dissembling; but I think Miss Castillain has cause to know him best, except, of course, yourself and your sister."

"Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, turning slowly, and speaking with intense, suppressed emotion, "will you tell Miss Marjorie our story—Magdalen's and mine—and will you wait and listen to one chapter which I have never spoken of until this evening, when I told it to Sir Neil Athelston?"

Quietly now, the young man related the story which had been told in heat and scorn a few hours before. And the colonel answered not one word—not one single word—but he just laid his hand on that of the nameless artist, the returned convict, the homicide; and grasped it so closely and tightly that Fitz Spendir knew this meant far more than a good-bye.

The two men walked down the garden together, and parted at the gate. Then Fitz stood there a few minutes, alone in the darkness and the silence, for the storm which had risen three hours before among the hills had lulled. Presently that silence was broken by voices and footsteps. They were coming, then, at last; and Fitz was conscious of a feeling almost of relief, until there broke upon his ear the raised, cold voice of Dorcas Cheere.

"Yes, that's the cottage; next to mine, more's the shame and pity"—these were the words he heard—"and it's a good thing that you've come to take him to-night; I should have been frightened enough to be near him through another night and darkness. Goodness knows what he mightn't have done; for a man that can kill one can kill another."

The young man smiled oddly as he listened; yet the words fell far more heavily upon his ear than did the rough salute of the men whose business it was to take him to his long imprisonment.

"To think I should have lived close to such danger all these months!" muttered Dorcas, lingering to listen, and to enjoy the suggestive clinking of the handcuffs. "It must have been just such as he that took my little girl."

The other words, if there were any, were lost to Fitz as the men led him away; but these kept repeating themselves again and again to him,

"Just such as he—"

And as he walked away, slowly and silently in the darkness, Dorcas passed on into her cottage, where the patient child sat waiting to tell her the story of his little life.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SEARCH FOR LINA.

Miss Castillain lounged before the drawing-room fire at Hawkedale, with the second volume of a new novel in her hand. But though she was highly interested in the fate of the golden-haired and angelic heroine therein portrayed, she went but slowly through the volume; because whenever she heard the sound of the hall-bell vibrating through the silent old house, she slipped it under the cushion of the couch, and leaned back, with her white hands lying on the masses of bright wools which were scattered in picturesque confusion on the rich folds of her black silk dress.

No one, except the servants (who most of them hated her with a pious hatred), ever ventured to assert that Miss Castillain was wearing mourning for Mr. Jelfrey; but certain it is that since Fitz Spendir had been pronounced guilty of manslaughter at the magisterial inquiry at Churchill, she had worn only this one black dress ("though she wouldn't, if it wasn't a handsome and becoming one," as her maid declared, with a toss of her head). And, indeed, if abjuring all colors constitutes wearing mourning, Louisa Castillain did mourn for the man whom she delighted to fancy she had loved with an undying love. And beyond the black dress, she wore a sorrowful resignation on her face, a melancholy droop in her light-blue eyes, and a graceful inertness in her whole attitude; wore them, at least, to all who called at Hawkedale in those days (and they were many, for the curiosity and sympathy of Highshire had been roused by that scene at the mountain tarn); and, of course, no one saw the novel under the sofa-pillow, or heard, either, the sharp words in the store-room, or the gossip in the dressing-room.

But there are few of us who could bear the examination of our skeleton-closet by our morning callers; so we will let Louisa practice with impunity her little harmless fictions.

This time, however, the book was put away unnecessarily, and the effect of the pretty hands among the brilliant skeins was wasted; for when the door opened it was only to admit Marjorie, although the step was so different from the light step which belonged to her that even Louisa had not recognized it.

"Riding again!" she said, sneering a little as she surreptitiously drew the novel from its hiding-place. "What induces you to ride forever?"

"What else is there to do?"

Marjorie asked the question with an intense listlessness, as she stood opposite her sister. Her habit (dropped as if her hands were tired of it) lay in thick folds upon the rug, her whip was thrown upon the easy-chair behind her, her hands were locked upon the carved old chimney-piece, and her eyes were fixed upon the fire,

"What else is there to do!" echoed Louisa; "why, plenty of things, I should think, for a girl like you. You have not been to the school for this whole fortnight. Mr. Jorden will be astonished at our neglect, and *I* can not be expected to—to take an interest in those things again yet."

"No," replied Marjorie, tersely; "don't try. Let it drop."

"But it is not right to let these things drop," put in the elder sister, resignedly. "I never should, under ordinary circumstances."

"I shall be very glad when you feel inclined to do them again, Louie," Marjorie said, almost sadly, "and to take pleasure in them. But please don't ask me. I don't feel it's of any use to do 'these things,' as you say, unless one feels sure they are benefiting either one's self or others. I know I should not benefit any one now; not myself, for I should be chafing sorely all the time I taught; not the children, for I should fail in giving them the easiest lesson of all. I could not even tell them what p-a-t-i-e-n-c-e spells."

"And so you find your time pass more profitably, randomly riding about the country alone, or joining Neil at some dismal place among the hills? Riding together as you used to do is a different thing from this."

"Very different," assented Marjorie, without raising her eyes.

"And, really," Miss Castillain added, with acrimony, "I wonder you can act as you do, when you know how the Highshire people talk."

"What sort of people?" inquired Marjorie, listlessly.

"And I doubly wonder," continued her sister, unheeding the remark, "how you can persist in it, when you must see what a continual insult to you was Neil's behavior to Miss Chester while she lived with his mother, and what a double insult now is his assiduity in searching for her himself, setting every tongue busy with your name. As if it were not enough," lamented Louisa, with a dismal relish, "for *me* to be the subject of gossip and pity!"

Marjorie's lips curled a little, but still her eyes were not lifted.

"Why don't you take off your habit before you come in here?" inquired Louisa. "Are you going to do so at all?"

"Presently. Louie, has Colonel Stuart been here to-day?"

"No. Why?"

"Because he said he hoped to come. If I thought he had been prevented," mused Marjorie, "I would ride on to The Anchorage before I take off my habit."

"Well, I'm sure," ejaculated Louisa, "I wouldn't ride after *him* as well as after Neil, if I were you, Marjorie; you do nothing else all day."

"One thing more," said Marjorie; "I count the days as they crawl on, and long most vainly for the months to fly till they bring March."

"And may I ask why?" drawled Louisa, scornfully, though she knew perfectly well.

"Yes, you may ask if you like," returned Marjorie, simply; "but, as you know, I shall not answer."

"Polite; but I would advise you not to let every body see how interested you are in that man's trial."

"December, January, February, March—nearly four months," counted Marjorie. "I tell them over to myself so often that they seem to grow more instead of less."

"I, too, wish the trial were over," put in Louisa, with a long-drawn sigh. "It will be a very trying scene for me—very trying, indeed."

Marjorie glanced long and questioningly at her sister as these words were uttered; but when she read the vindictiveness which dictated them, the listless quietness on her face vanished suddenly.

"If that busy, restless, selfish Neil finds—finds Miss Chester before the trial," she said, her clear young voice full of passionate anger, "I will—I will—"

"Will what?" sneered the sister. "Will never speak to him again, were you going to say? Suppose he does not value that threat quite so much as you may fancy?"

"Be quiet!" cried Marjorie, with a quick stamp of her foot. "Even Neil, in this cruel, selfish pursuit of his, is not so contemptible as you are. He *wants* to be kind to her, only he does not know the wisest way, and loves himself much better than he loves her. But you—you think of no one but yourself, no one; and all *your* grief is only cruelty dressed in hypocritical mourning. There, I knew I should not be able to help saying it some day soon—and now it is said."

"Have you quite finished?" questioned Louisa, with slow scorn in her tone, and raising her light eyebrows languidly. "Your vulgarity, with all your care, still peeps out at times, and I am getting hopeless of ever seeing you different."

"Will you never think my words are real and earnest?" panted the younger girl. "You always treat me as if I were a baby or an idiot. If I am vexed, you enjoy my vexation; if I am glad, you sneer at my happiness; if I am sad, you laugh at my silence. Oh, I am so tired of it!"

The cry rushed up from an overburdened heart, and though Louisa's ears—dull and selfish ever—distinguished none of its yearning pathos, she uttered her next words a little more gently.

"It is most strange to see Neil eager in this chase: he is so lazy always, so afraid of exertion, so indifferent to other people's troubles."

"I watch him in astonishment," said Marjorie, presently, too thoroughly engrossed with other thoughts to resent any thing her sister had said—"an astonishment that now and then borders on admiration, for, under all his lazy indifference, there actually seems to throb a real passionate power and earnestness."

"I'm sorry it is there, if it is to be directed so," said Louisa, with a provoking leisureliness.

A quick look Marjorie gave into the sharp, fair face.

"I am very sorry it is directed *so*," she said, truthfully; "but I don't suppose our reasons are quite the same."

"Of course," ruminated Miss Castillain, complacently, "the girl is sure to be found before the assizes. Still her evidence, though it would be satisfactory to have it, is not necessary. We three are quite enough to have seen poor Eustace murdered."

"Don't cry, Louisa," remarked her sister,

dryly, seeing Louisa putting her handkerchief to her eyes at the mention of Mr. Jelfrey by his Christian name (a luxury of speech which she had adopted with her black dress). "You needn't cry; I don't suppose he is dead at all."

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Miss Castillain, as she had many times before exclaimed at this coolly pronounced idea, "how can you hurt and insult me as you do? Do you suppose that I was blind or mad that evening?"

"I don't say he did not fall into the pool," put in Marjorie, gently; "only I say I believe he is not dead."

"You only insist on it to aggravate me," whined Louisa; "and you didn't let me finish what I was going to say. Do you suppose that, if he were alive, he would not be here?—that he would not have come to me?"

"I can not tell," replied the younger girl, with a gleam of her old humor, "because I never did and never shall understand any one of his inscrutable designs. Did *you* ever quite understand him?"

The scarlet mounted to the very roots of Miss Castillain's fair, frizzled hair as she met her sister's eyes—the eyes that were so brightly honest in their questioning—and she answered as she would not have done if she had been at her ease,

"It is not many girls who would side with the murderer of their sister's lover."

"It is astonishing," said Marjorie, quietly turning aside the remark, "to see how greatly Lady Athelston misses Miss Chester."

"Perhaps it is for his mother's sake, then, that Neil is so indefatigable in his search," proposed Louisa, spitefully.

"Perhaps so; and it is just as astonishing to see how Colonel Stuart takes this affair to heart. He has been to the jail—he has been to see Mr. Spendir again and again, and he tries— Louie," she added, checking herself with a sudden tightening of her lips, "you heard that strange story which Neil told us the other night about Mr. Spendir calling himself an Athelston?"

"Ridiculous!" snapped Miss Castillain; "yes, I heard, of course, and I didn't wonder at his laughing over it as such an absurdity. I only wonder at the man's volunteering to cast a slur on his own birth just now, and at Neil's condescending to repeat such rubbish, even to us."

"I think," said Marjorie, thoughtfully, "that Neil told us as a piece of diplomacy for which I should hardly have given him credit. He fancied Mr. Spendir would tell it all to the magistrates, and he wished us to hear his own ironical version of it first; that we might be prepared to look upon it only as absurd and idiotic, and a sign of Mr. Spendir's crowning degradation—as he represented it."

"Absurd and idiotic and degrading indeed; I should think so!" was the prompt reply. "And I believe Colonel Stuart has heard it too. Why, I should think this man did it to prepare the way for a plea of insanity in his defense. He is cunning enough to have invented it for that purpose."

"Of course it will be looked into," mused Marjorie.

"Looked into! Surely no one would condescend to look into any thing so preposterous."

"Suppose it turns out that he is the real baronet," Marjorie went on, with a great thoughtfulness in her voice, and a dancing light in her eyes; "what a contrast to the present one—or, I ought to say, in that case, what a contrast to the presumptive one!"

"Rather a contrast to the real one, indeed," sneered Miss Castillain. "You would hardly have jumped so readily then at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?"

"Did I jump at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?" questioned Marjorie, very slowly; "then I am sure I should have leaped— What a sneer, Louie! I really dare not finish my sentence."

"What makes you think Colonel Stuart is coming here this afternoon?" asked Louisa, beginning to think it would be safest to put her book away for good.

"Because he told me, this morning at the post-office, that he wished to see papa."

"And did you ask him to call?"

"No. I only said I had not believed before that any one ever really wished to see papa."

"Oh, Marjorie, how disgusted he must have been!" cried the elder sister, with pious horror; yet rather enjoying the thought, and the sight of the heightened color in Marjorie's cheeks.

"He *was* very much disgusted," assented Marjorie, without reluctance; "he would have been more scornful to me than usual, only for the fact of its impossibility."

"Even Neil says you have no filial piety," mourned Miss Castillain, regretfully.

"Some day I will study the part from you," was the slow reply; "but, Louie, don't let us speak of— The words I came in on purpose to say, I have not said yet. I seem as if I were always saying them," she added, sadly, "and always deciding never to say them again; yet —yet here I am to plead once more my old request."

"You need not repeat it," struck in Louisa, coldly; "I know what you mean, and it will be as useless to say it now as it has always been. It is only an insult to me for you to be perpetually telling me what you wish my conduct to be toward that wicked man and his sister—if she really be his sister. I will not go on listening to you; I will not; so you need not try."

Louisa's voice rose shrilly in her excitement.

"I will not try, then," answered Marjorie, the words almost rushing from her hot, quivering lips; "I have said again and again that I will not, and yet I always break my word."

"Yes, you do," concurred Louisa, her handkerchief once more applied to her dry eyes, "and I never shall have any peace until that trial is over, and the man is transported for life, and the girl disgraced forever."

"Oh, Louie, hush!—hush!—have a little pity!"

The quick, pained cry just faintly reached the ears of Colonel Stuart as he passed unobserved by the drawing-room windows, and made him, almost unconsciously, hesitate at the door before ringing. And while he waited, Marjorie broke her word again, and pleaded yet once more for the solitary man in the county jail, whose life and liberty seemed to her to be in her sister's power; and then for the lonely girl to whom it would be worse than death to be brought back to the lonely home she knew.

But again, as it had been day after day, the

prayer was unheeded, the request coldly denied; and once more the younger girl's great earnestness—always a hopeful earnestness—slowly died.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Louisa at last, as she rose and shook out the rich, crisp plaits of her tunic, "do leave off these theatrical scenes. You would, if you could see how unbecoming they are. Let those people alone. What have you to do with them, or they with you—low impostors as they are? If I did not feel really lowered by your conduct, I could laugh at it; but I can not even laugh, to see you making yourself so ridiculous for a man who has been committed for murder, and who can not hope to be found guilty of less, whatever people may say about the defense being reserved. Bah! I should like to know where they are to find a defense; though Colonel Stuart, I do verily believe—"

But Louisa stopped at last. What was the use of finishing her tirade without an audience?

Marjorie had risen slowly from her coaxing attitude, and left the room. The shafts had sped after her from Louisa's tongue, but it would be useless to hurl another now, for the door had closed quietly behind the younger sister, and the elder one was left alone with her spleen, feeling uncomfortably mortified, as we do when "left behind," even in a quarrel.

Crossing the hall, with her cheeks and eyes aflame, Marjorie became suddenly aware that Colonel Stuart was entering it. He put down his hat, and advanced to her with the easy, quiet at-homeness which characterized him. "Miss Marjorie," he said, retaining her hand only for an instant, and not seeming to see the emotion in her face, "I hear your father is out at present. May I wait for him?"

Not a direct question, beyond that obvious fact of his waiting, yet Marjorie knew instinctively that he wished to speak to her before her father's arrival, and that he had timed his visit for that purpose.

She led him in silence to that sombre and ugly room where Mr. Castillain's business interviews were always held, and, closing the door upon them, waited for him to speak.

"Sir Neil Athelston has gone to London this afternoon, Miss Marjorie," he said, as he put her a chair beside the smoldering fire. "He has, as I suspected, obtained a clue to Miss Chester's whereabouts, and is following it up now."

Marjorie knew that the colonel's eyes were not fixed in curiosity upon her face; she knew him far too well to imagine it; yet she could not help the slow, rich color gathering there, as she turned to him, astonished and grieved.

"Oh, Colonel Stuart, how very, very sorry I am! We have tried so hard to prevent this, and now for us to have so utterly failed! How is it?"

"Do not say utterly failed yet, as even this clue may be unavailing. But Athelston's chance was always much better than ours, as I told you. He had professional aid acting secretly for him; we could not call in professional aid to conceal her, could we? It would have been as good as an acknowledgment of guilt or fear on her part."

"Yes, you told me that before," replied Marjorie, as if unwillingly; "but I always thought that the chance would be greater on the side of right and compassion than on that of wrong and selfishness."

"I fancy it will be so when we can look back and see the whole way clearly," he answered, gently; "now we can only grope a few steps at a time; not seeing the winning or the losing side, only trusting."

"When a thing is disappointing," Marjorie said, "I always ask insanely why it is so. No, of course we could not get professional aid to keep Miss Chester away, or to upset Neil on his way to the station; so we shall have to fold our hands and look on, while the poor girl's heart breaks in that miserable court. Colonel Stuart," she added, with a quick, impetuous change in her voice, "can Neil—*even* Neil—ever be so really cruel as to bring her here?"

"He would not think it cruel," said the colonel, while he pondered the emphasized word in her speech. "He thinks it cruel to leave her alone, as he presumes her to be. You can not blame him for the cruelty which *you* see in this act, because he sees it so differently."

"I don't think he sees it at all," returned the girl, with quick contempt; "he only sees how disagreeable it is to be foiled, for the first time in his life, and how much pleasanter it was for him to have Miss Chester about his house. Surely he will never take her there, where we can see the poor girl's misery, without being able to help her or to share it? I promised to do what I could for her, and *that* is what we are doing."

"This is not your doing," put in the colonel, gently, noticing how the girl's hot fingers were clasped together in her earnestness. "I hope Athelston will bring her to The Anchorage, if he brings her back at all. Adelaide will be glad to have her."

"Oh, Colonel Stuart!" whispered Marjorie, "I wish the clue had been given to you instead of to Neil."

He smiled, but his eyes filled with a great gladness at her words.

"I wish so, too," he said; "but let us feel sure that he will use his information kindly at last."

Marjorie's lip curled.

"I can not feel sure—I can not fancy it. I have as little faith in that as in Louie's forbearance at the trial."

"Is she not more lenient yet?"

"Less so—less and less so every day. Oh, if I could but—"

The words ceased suddenly, but Colonel Stuart knew what was the prayer she urged so often and so vainly with her sister.

"I think that is papa," she cried, suddenly starting up. "Colonel Stuart, has your wish to see him any thing to do with—with what we have been talking about?"

He laughed his negative—partly in the very heartiness of his contradiction, partly to bring a smile to her face, before she should encounter her father's keen and suspicious glance.

Slowly Marjorie mounted the dark old oaken staircase, as the twilight shadows settled in the corners, and spread gloomily from step to step. Her close, dark habit, unrelieved by any color, was like one of the embodied shadows clinging about her; yet her beautiful eyes were soft and wistful, and her lips were quivering like a child's.

An hour afterward, she descended the scantily lighted staircase, in a softly flowing Cashmere dress of delicate blue, and with a tender winter

rose in her brown hair; yet now her face was still and grave, her lips firmly and almost scornfully set, and her step slow and listless. What need to hasten when there was a whole long evening to spend alone with Louisa?

But an unexpected greeting awaited her when she entered the drawing-room.

"Marjorie," her sister exclaimed, turning sharply to her, "why did you not tell me Colonel Stuart was coming to dinner?"

"I didn't know," said Marjorie, coldly; "I didn't like to ask him whether he should stay if papa invited him; and, if I had, I should still have thought it extremely unlikely that papa *would* invite him."

"I had no idea of it when I ordered dinner, and I'm as vexed as I can be," chafed Miss Castillain, taking out and re-arranging the jet butterfly in her hair, as she stood before the mirror. "I'm always being treated in this unfair way."

"Are you quite sure Colonel Stuart *is* staying to dine here?" inquired the younger sister, in a voice that was slow and quiet in its scorn. "I should have considered it so very unlikely."

"Don't be a hypocrite," was the retort. "He must have told you."

"If he had told me," said Marjorie, quietly, as she stood with her back to the table, watching her sister's manœuvres at the glass, "I should have begged him not to come."

"I shall believe that when I hear you do it."

"I should have begged him not to come," repeated the girl, unmoved. "I should have said, 'Why should you come, Colonel Stuart, when you have such a pleasant home of your own? Why should you come here? There's nothing but a gloomy dinner of feeble soup and our own everlasting mutton. My father will only entertain you with his experience in keeping twice as many sheep as any one else on half as much land; Louisa will only pretend to cry, and look as lugubrious as a clown off the stage; and I shall only snap at every body and every thing, and fail to get much flavor to my life even out of that. Why, in the name of all that's jocund, should you come?' I should have said that, if I had had the faintest idea that he was insane enough to think of it. I shall never again give Colonel Stuart credit for any wisdom at all."

With a pleased laugh, that was not at all beautifying to the fair, classical face, Louisa turned suddenly from the mirror.

"Oh, Marjorie!" she cried, with a little affected shriek and clasp of her hands, "look who is here! Oh, Colonel Stuart, we did not hear you! I hope you did not overhear my sister's speech? She couldn't help it; she thought she was alone. Did you overhear it?"

"Yes," he answered, looking across into Marjorie's vexed eyes, "I heard. Miss Marjorie, why did you ever give me credit for any wisdom at all, and how have I forfeited that credit now?"

"Of course I gave you credit for it," she answered, calmly, though her heart was beating heavily in her vexation; "because I felt it must be wisdom which dictated your perpetual lectures to me; and you have forfeited that credit now by stopping to dine with us."

"And why?"

"Because we are such a—horrid family."

The words darted out brokenly, but still she kept her calm, defiant attitude and expression.

"Marjorie is provoked to-night, and—and perhaps not very well, Colonel Stuart," put in Louisa, apologetically. "Please don't be hurt by her words; we are always glad to receive you at Hawkedale. You believe this, don't you?"

"No," answered the colonel, slowly, while a laugh gathered in his eyes; "I do not believe your sister is glad to receive me now. It makes no difference, though; I am just as glad to *be* received."

"Marjorie, you didn't mean that, did you?" pleaded her sister, coaxingly.

"I mean exactly what I said, Colonel Stuart," returned Marjorie, her eyes wonderfully bright, in the defiance which struggled with their unusual shyness. "I meant that I *had* thought you wiser than most of us; but when you came here voluntarily to hear our bickerings, and see our tempers, and eat our wearisome mutton, and learn how to feed it cheaply, I lose the idea entirely, and pity your ignorance."

The smile that puckered her lips was irresistible, and Colonel Stuart laughed with heartiness.

"There is dinner," put in Miss Castillain, a little discomfited; "and here is papa. Colonel Stuart, will you come?"

But before he gave her his arm he spoke an instant to Marjorie, the laughter still in his voice.

"I like the mutton, Miss Marjorie, and I like being taught to do things without going to unnecessary expense; and, besides that, I have not told you" (the voice was lowered here, and only she could catch it) "all about Athelston's journey."

"What's that? Is Stuart up to a joke—eh?" questioned Mr. Castillain, with his keen, abrupt chuckle, as he let his younger daughter lay her unwilling hand upon his seedy coat-sleeve.

"I believe he must have been, papa; or he is very hungry," she answered, demurely; "for he was proposing *revenir à nos moutons*."

Miss Castillain's polite little speech was broken into by her cavalier's stifled laugh as he caught Marjorie's double meaning.

Not one chance fell to Marjorie, all that night, of hearing what Colonel Stuart had to tell her about Neil's new search, and, in real despair, she went into the hall at last, just before she said good-night. But Louisa came out with him, and destroyed that last chance, too.

"Oh, I forgot one thing, Miss Marjorie," he remarked, turning back from the door, as if with a sudden remembrance, "Mrs. Cheere wants to see you."

"Thank you," she answered, so eagerly that she hastened to speak further when she detected the gratitude in her own voice, "I will go to-morrow, Colonel Stuart. Thank you for bringing me the message. I shall be out at noon to-morrow, and I will go to the cottage then."

He said "Thank you" too, almost as if unconsciously. And then he was gone.

"A nice, agreeable temper you have been in all the evening," said Louisa, as the girls entered the drawing-room again. "You would not say a good word of Neil once, though you saw papa getting angry about it. I'm sure Colonel Stuart thought you most flippant, and he is sure to tell Neil."

"Never! *He* is honorable, whatever I may be. Now, papa, do you feel inclined for a dose of cribbage?"

And so the girl, tired and sad, sat down to the game she knew her father enjoyed, and let her sister's speeches pass unresented and unnoticed; the unselfish nature conquering, as it generally did, and fighting its triumphant way through the hasty impulses and warm, impetuous anger which belonged to her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORM AMONG THE HILLS.

THE dusk of that November afternoon, two weeks before, was deepening rapidly, when Lina Chester woke to consciousness upon the grass beside the mountain lake, and rose slowly to her feet. Quick, almost as a lightning-flash, the past hour rushed back to her; and she stood in the solitude, bewildered and afraid, her cold hands pressed upon her temples, and her eyes wide and dark and desolate.

No one was within sight; no one in the whole wide extent of valley and hill-side. The silent water held its secret then, as safely as it held it through the anxious months that followed, and she turned from it, shuddering in every limb. Where were they gone?

Slowly all—even of what she had *not* seen—grew clear to the girl's dazed mind; and then she turned from the water, and, with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse—not of personal fear or self-preservation, but of something stronger than either to the loving and brave-hearted girl—fled across the hills beyond the water-fall, fled rapidly, lightly, and without glancing back, as we only flee in a great dread.

Gradually the valley narrowed, shut in by the heavy, frowning hills; the dark firs rose gloomily against the winter evening sky, or stood in dense blackness against the dim mountain-side; the swollen brook, leaping here restively in its narrow bed, dashed on among the rocks in the narrowing ravine, with a sound that was weird in its strong reverberation. Closer and closer came the heavy rocks to hem her in, dark masses leaning now above the rugged path as if about to fall upon her. In the deepening darkness, and the loneliness and silence, the girl at last grew frightened in her heart.

So tiny and powerless and helpless she felt in this awful solitude, the hills gathering more and more closely upon her as she hastened breathlessly on. With a shivering of her eyelids, she stood and looked down upon the water, as it hurried away, seeming to seek, like herself—only in wisdom and in innocence, she felt—an outlet from this sombre bed. Only in wisdom and in innocence! Did the whole difference lie in that?

Long and intently Lina gazed and wondered. Could any cry which she might utter be heard in the world beyond the hills? Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, they stretched. Could a tired cry, even a dying cry, pierce beyond them? Or would it only echo and re-echo among the rocks around, waking weird answering voices that might form a fitting coranach? Was this gray, restless water deep enough to hide her, or would it rush on, and leave *something* lying there, to make the solitude even more ghastly, and turn the silence even more horribly into the silence of death?

Covering her eyes at the thought, Lina turned from the brink of the noisy brook, and made her way once more along the rocky and uneven path. Her stiff, white lips were moving slowly, as if she fancied that, even in her isolation and helplessness—even in this immense loneliness, and with the shadow of a great guilt touching her—there was One who would hear those low-breathed words.

Would she ever reach a human habitation? If she were but at the top of the hill, she thought, she could breathe without this heavy, frightened pain; and she should find a cottage sooner, perhaps. She had begun her flight with one longing only, thinking nothing of either fatigue or loneliness; but now another longing had come, and grew intense as she sped on and on. The longing to find refuge in a human habitation before the utter darkness fell upon her, and she was left alone here in the tremendous loneliness, that nameless voice ever whispering to her the terrible word which had seemed to pierce her heart, before she fell beside the treacherous mountain tarn.

She knew now that she was one of the few—thank Heaven, only the few!—who feel the full horror of that word, as we can never feel it, while we only hear it, or see it, again and again repeated in the newspapers.

Stifling that thought as quickly as she could, she climbed on, though the way was rugged and her feet unutterably weary. A mist was creeping now across the hills, and a light, swift rain began to fall. Bending her head against it as she climbed, she could advance but slowly. The mist came on, covering the distant hills. Only the dim outlines of the near ones were visible now, as she struggled on higher and higher, each step more difficult, and each minute the rain falling more heavily.

Behind, and far below her now, the chill gray water rushed on its course, its maddening and monotonous sound subdued and broken. Around her, through the mist, she saw sometimes the dim and shivering sheep huddled in twos and threes beneath a bare winter tree. Above her, she still saw the dim outlines of the nearer hills. A longing came upon Lina to scream; to scream at the very top of her voice; not so much in the vain hope of an answer as in the fierce desire of disturbing the indescribable weight of silence.

The wind was rising, and the rain increased rapidly as it did so. The stormy gusts tore through the fir-trees, and drove the rain before them, straight and pitilessly down upon the tired, stooping little figure.

Ah!—dear Heaven, kind Heaven—there was a light at last; a square of ruddy, cheery light, glimmering in a cottage window on before her. With the sure instinct born of a sore need, Lina made her way to the cottage-door, and knocked.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHELTER.

THERE was little need for Lina to tell her story in order to gain admission to the cottage. The old woman, its single occupant, who raised her light and let it fall upon the wan, frightened face, waited for no plea. She drew the girl to the glowing little fire, and, moved by that com-

passion which in its purity and unsuspiciousness comes straight from Heaven, had clasped warm, tender arms about her, when a sleep, that was deep and sudden as death, fell upon the weary girl, and blotted out her miserable heart-weariness.

Beside the little bed where she lay so white and helpless, the old woman watched alone; for no doctor could be reached from the isolated mountain cottage, even if she could have left her patient to go in search of one. She was glad of this next day, when Lina, her great dark eyes so full of gratitude, yet of their old fear, too, moaned to her to let no one else come. So she watched and nursed alone, with that tempered strength which seems always lent to watchers beside a sick-bed; and at last memory came back; and life returned to the wan face that lay upon the hard, brown pillow.

"I wish," sighed the old woman to herself, "that that 'Rachel' she's been so often sobbing for when she didn't know it could come, if only to comfort her, poor dear! But I couldn't go to find her, even if I knew where she was; and as I've managed so far, I'll try to manage till she's about again."

"I live most lonely here, my dear," she said to Lina one day, when the girl lay in the ease of returning strength. "I see no one from Monday to Saturday, except just once a month (one Saturday in every month), when I walk into Churchill to see my son, and get the money he allows me, and to do my bit of marketing for the month. You may fancy it's no light walk for me—nine miles, good; and I have to start this weather as soon as ever it is daylight. Still I consider it my bit of holiday, and next Saturday's the day."

The delicate, pale lips quivered as Lina spoke, her thoughts running wildly on before her words.

"Are you not near a station?—I mean, could you not go by train?"

"I'm just two miles from a station, and nine miles from town," was the slow answer; "but I never hesitate, my dear. I never have been in one of those railway things, and never shall go. They're unnatural. I don't quite trust them."

"Yet you are not afraid of living in this lonely spot?" the girl said.

"No; it's always been natural to me, just as it's natural to the sheep to lie on the hill-side without fear. It isn't being alone I'm afraid of."

"Have you no neighbors," asked Lina, flushing vividly, as if the dim eyes and unsuspicious heart could read the real motive of her questioning, "who come in here to have a chat with you, or to—to tell you the news from Churchill?"

"Just perhaps once in a while, my dear," was the cheery answer, "but not often, for I've none within a'most a mile, and I don't care about it. I can live very snugly without any news. I hear it all when I go into Churchill. I shall hear it all on Saturday."

The scarlet crept higher and higher on Lina's face—the beautiful face that had lain for days so white and still—and she nervously tried to hide it.

"I have had one neighbor in since you've been here, my dear," the old woman continued, almost soothingly, "but I didn't tell of you being here at all. I wouldn't, till I knew you wouldn't mind it."

The tears crowded to the girl's eyes at this kind thought.

"Oh, how good you are to me!" she cried; "and I can never repay you!"

"Hush, my dear! you'll grieve me sorely if you take to talk like that."

And then, in the real refinement of her Heaven-taught compassion, the old woman moved softly about the room, as if busy for herself, talking of other things, and drawing the girl's thoughts to feel that her presence in the cottage was brightening and cheering. And when the tired look would creep back into the worn face, and the feverish light to the wide eyes, she would find it necessary to go into the other room, and leave the girl to rest alone. But what was this resting alone to Lina? With her face hidden and her thin fingers clasped, she only moaned to Heaven for pardon, because she must deceive another who had been kind and good and pitiful to her, and because she must abuse the simple trust which had been reposed in her, and had saved her.

It was Saturday morning, and by the light of a flickering candle Lina's kind old nurse was preparing for her long walk into Churchill. Lina had risen as early as *she* had, and was helping her deftly in this preparation, hovering about her with prompt and dainty little attentions such as the old woman had never received before through all her seventy years.

"I wish you'd just lain still, my dear," she said, watching the girl's anxious face (which was pale to-day, she fancied, with even a new pallor); "I'd rather see you resting than troubling about here after me—I'm used to wait on myself. Why, bless me! I haven't had such a breakfast set and made for me I don't know when, if ever; nor am I used to having every thing prepared o my hand in this way. But I can't bear to see you do it."

"I like to do it—so much," whispered Lina; "I couldn't lie in bed to-day—I'm so strong now. I like to do this best of all. I shall like to remember it!"

"I suppose I'm ready now, my dear," said the old woman, laying a clean white cloth to cover the bottom of her basket, and wondering when Lina would turn her eyes fully to hers again; "and all I've got to ask is this: is there any body in Churchill that will want to know—I mean, my dear, have you any message to send by me? I'll take and learn it off, and give it just as you give it to me."

The dark, sad eyes met hers at last, yet still with a shrinking in their depths that almost looked like shame.

"I know you would," the girl said, gently; "but, kind nurse, I have no message to send, no one to send a message to."

Wistfully, almost humbly, as she spoke, Lina put her arms about the neck of the old woman who had so pitifully tended and sheltered her, and left a gentle, lingering kiss upon the withered cheek.

"My dear," the woman whispered, in her astonishment, "take care of yourself to-day; I don't like to leave you, but there's no help for it. I'll be as quick as ever I can. Why are you dressed?"

"I'm coming with you a little way," said Lina, turning the key in the door as they left the cot-

tage. "I dare say you never lock the door and take the key with you when you only go away for a few minutes, but I'm not so brave as you are, and I shall feel more comfortable."

Again, upon the hill-side path, out of sight of the cottage, Lina kissed her kind old friend, and said good-bye; and then she stood and watched her, until a turn in the rugged way hid them from each other.

"Thanking me so makes a perfect baby of me," muttered the old woman, rubbing her dim eyes, "kissing me and thanking me as if I'd been—Well, well, it's no use thinking of it, and making myself look foolish all day. It will be pleasant to have her waiting there for me to-night. How many years is it since I had any one to welcome me at my home-coming? Ah, I could hardly count the years. Perhaps she'll even come a little way to meet me in the gloaming."

This thought kept recurring to her happily all through her nine-mile walk; but she uttered no word of it when she reached her son's house, and met his questions. Loitering beside her, and jestingly discussing her probable purchases, he moved the cloth which covered the bottom of her basket.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed, as he did so, "it isn't like you, to have the key of your house loose here? Where's your safe under-pocket?"

"The what—the what, lad?" she cried, a sick faintness seeming to seize her. (The lad to her was a wrinkled, gray-haired man to others.)

"The key of your cottage, generally so snugly packed in an out-of-the-way pocket," he said; "you must have been very careless this morning."

The marketing that day was done at random. Even the little present for Lina (about which so much kind anxiety had been felt) was forgotten. No thought had the kind old woman that was half so urgent a one as the thought that she must hasten home and open the cottage-door for the girl whom she had nursed back to health, and who, weak and delicate still, was locked out of the house now, with no chance of warmth, or food, or resting-place. How came the key to have dropped from her hand into the basket?

The long walk was over at last; the locked-up cottage was within sight, and now the dim eyes looked around, eagerly searching among the shadows. Ah! this was to have been such a pleasant home-coming. No young figure disturbed the solitude of the old familiar scene. No voice answered to her faint, troubled call. The rooms, when she entered them, had become the solitary empty rooms of old times; the solitary empty rooms which—she said to herself, with a tired glance around—of course they would always be.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE.

The third-class train to London passed the village station at eight o'clock, so Lina had an hour for her two-mile walk. She had watched her kind nurse out of sight, through hot tears; her last glance had rested on the little cottage where she had been so kindly welcomed, and she walked on rapidly in the dim morning twilight.

The village station looked dismal enough, with yesterday's ashes in the grates, and yesterday's dust and rubbish lying undisturbed as yet. There were several third-class passengers waiting; some wearing the wan, dull look which she knew she wore herself; others busy and excited, claiming prompt acquaintance with each other, just as if another station would not separate them again, perhaps forever.

Quite silently Lina sat in a corner of the dusty carriage, when the train at last rolled slowly on toward London, while noisy voices about her talked of things which came so near her own frightened thoughts that her very heart ached as she waited breathlessly for what might follow.

The glass was dull enough, but Lina gazed through it into the mist of the November morning, dreading to turn her head. On they went, a little faster now, through plowed fields where the upturned soil and the men and horses all had the same dull hue which the sky reflected. It was quite a relief presently to pass a group of workmen standing on the edge of the line, in their white blouses. On again, past gray fields, gray lanes, gray cottages. Once, when in the midst of one of these gray fields, she saw a little silent pool on which the brown bulrushes leaned and faded, she shivered with a horrible remembrance. And when the cold, bright sun pierced through the clouds at last, and the fir-trees stood up like columns against the brightening eastern light, memory came back, bringing those fir-trees on the mountain. Ah! could that one memory ever again be absent from her mind?

The slow third-class train deposited its passengers at Euston, and became, for a time, a useless piece of station furniture. Through the London streets (timidly and shrinkingly, as she had trodden them just once before) Lina walked in the dusk which gathers there so early on a November afternoon. Some who met her noticed pityingly the sadness of her young white face; but they were the few. The many passed on, busy and engrossed as is the crowd of London, beyond the crowd of any other city.

"Conduit Street—number seven—at last," murmured the girl to herself, as she stopped before the familiar door. "I knew the number was right upon my letter to Rachel. I wonder why she did not answer."

"Miss M'Mullen?" repeated the servant who answered Lina's ring. "Oh, she left here months ago. I believe she went to Arthur Street; you know it—out of Oxford Street. I'm not sure about the number, but I think it's twenty; you may as well try twenty, at any rate. It'll do no harm if you're wrong by a door or two. But I think it's twenty."

"Thank you," said Lina, earnestly. She knew London enough to know that even such civility and assistance as this were not always to be met with, and then she turned wearily away.

Along George Street she went as quickly as she could, trembling with an inexplicable sudden nervousness as the statue rose before her, dim and gigantic in the twilight. Passing through Hanover Square, she loitered a little; its hush and emptiness were like a rest and protection to her. Whether she might be going the most direct or most indirect way she did not know; she only knew that in this way she could reach Arthur Street eventually—could reach it and

Rachel—and she tried to make that thought dispel all fear.

Oxford Street at last. Arthur Street lay a long way eastward; a long, long way of dazzling glare, of jostling and of crushing; a long, long way, made more bitter by whispered remarks and quizzical salutes. An endless way she was beginning to think it, when a policeman pointed out to her the turning she sought.

Into the quiet side-street she hurried, as into a refuge, but a few steps brought her to the edge of a noisy, surging crowd. She must make her way past, and she did so, trembling with a nameless fear. Then she remembered happily that she should not have to pass it again. She should be with Rachel soon—safe and at rest with Rachel.

Ah, here was No. 19! One more—20! A quiet knock the girl gave, her heart beating heavily, now that the end of her journey was so near. The answer to her question came this time even more depressingly than it had come before.

Miss M'Mullen had left there after one month; had gone to live lower down on the other side. She (the speaker) did not know the number, did not know whether Miss M'Mullen would be there now or not. She could not trouble where all her lodgers went to, but it certainly was lower down on the other side.

Lina stood a moment after the door was shut, feeling very hopeless and bewildered. Then she roused herself. "Lower down on the other side." Not far away, perhaps. She should only have a few more minutes to spend in doubt and weariness—then rest and safety with Rachel.

"If Rachel is not here?" The vague, haunting doubt had forced its way at last through all her hope and bravery and confidence; and now it harassed and frightened her as it would, of its own fierce will.

"If there were no one to go to—" As the doubt took this cruel form, and would be battled with no longer, Lina instinctively sought for her purse.

"There was at least enough—"

A sudden stop in her slow walk; a sudden weakness and despair. She had no purse at all. Could it have been taken from her in the crowd? She could not tell; she only knew that she had had it at Euston, and that now it was gone.

"Penniless and alone—if Rachel is not here," she whispered to herself, in a dull, dazed agony. "But—but Rachel *will* be here," she cried, trying to kill the other thought. "Oh, she must be here! What was it? Where was it? Lower down—on the other side."

So lower down she went, and crossed the street. A last desperate courage had come to the girl, and she knocked at one door after another, with her urgent, oft-repeated question. And as she turned from each, her heart cried out, in its agony, for this one friend who had taken her in and comforted her in another far-back time of misery almost like this.

"Miss M'Mullen? Yes, I know her." (Ah, the longed-for answer at last!) "I'm sure to know her, for she lived here some bit—and a decent, respectable woman she was. But she fell ill, and I couldn't have her any longer—not I, unless I could have afforded to lose all my other lodgers. So she went—"

"Where?" faltered Lina. "Can you tell me where? Is it far from here? A long walk will it be?"

The woman looked curiously, even suspiciously, into the weary, dazed eyes.

"Why, bless me!" she exclaimed, "are you a friend of hers, and don't know where they took her? To hospital, of course—Guy's, I remember—and there she died almost directly. There, I'm called; it's always the way. You must excuse my shutting the door."

The street was a dull, prosaic street, yet it seemed as if the last scene of a life-tragedy were to be enacted now in one of its shadowy spots, where a frail, shivering figure leaned, faint and sick, against the post of a closed door.

Weary, starved, and penniless! Weary, yet with no hope of rest before her; starved, yet at no fireside could she either claim or buy a place; penniless in the heart of the great, abundant city, where every thing could be procured for money, and nothing could be procured without it.

Up into the gleam of gas-light opposite came some one with a firm, slow, almost cautious step; up straight toward Lina, but very slowly.

There was no need of haste. He had followed her for miles, and knew how wearily she walked. So he crossed the street but slowly—a gentleman with a warm, handsome face, and in a warm, handsome dress.

Weak and small and fragile the girl looked, leaning there in the shadow, and the tall, strong figure staggered an instant at this glimpse of her; then as his hands, in their warmth and eagerness, went out to meet her, the hurt, proud pain gave place to a pitying, protecting love upon his handsome Saxon face, and made it almost noble.

And the mental darkness which had been falling on Lina Chester vanished suddenly in the lightning flash of a new and terrible fear, when she saw that she was standing face to face with Sir Neil Athelston.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

Lina stood an instant, facing Sir Neil, with that proud shrinking in her eyes which he had seen before—he most of any one; but her will and power were weak and tired, his strong and firm; and so, almost before she was aware, she was driving rapidly through the lighted streets, and Sir Neil was opposite her in the cab. The cab was small, and the space limited, hence he was close beside her, as she knew; yet—as she did *not* know, for the other thought was all in all to her—he was really as far from her as he could possibly be.

He could not help but see how unwelcome his presence was, and he had the delicacy not to force it upon her unnecessarily. So he leaned forward in his corner, looking from the damp glass out upon the uninteresting prospect it disclosed, while he longed with an ardent longing to throw his strong, warm arms about the little trembling figure opposite him.

The horse was pulled up suddenly before the station-door, and Sir Neil got down and paid the fare at once. Then he offered his hand to Lina.

There was something new in his manner and

bearing to-night; something which made her rise without a word, and step down upon the pavement to him. She did not understand what it was—perhaps she did not care to try—but it made her leave the cab at his silent bidding, and wait for him; though she had scornfully passed his proffered hand, and was standing now as far from him as she could. He only allowed her a few moments to do so; he had paid the man, and so was free to join her at once.

"This way, Miss Chester, please."

That was all he said, slackening his steps to hers as she slowly turned, and so they walked together through the vestibule, and out upon the platform, to the door of the ladies' waiting-room.

"There's a splendid fire!" said Sir Neil as cheerily as he could. "Try to keep yourself warm and snug for half an hour here; we have that time to wait before we start. I am sorry; waiting is always such disagreeable work."

They had halted at the door, and for the first time Lina looked up full into her companion's face. He bent eagerly to catch her words.

"Start where?—start where?" she faltered. "I am not going—I can not go. Oh, let me stay in London!"

"It is just as impossible," replied Sir Neil, a little huskily, "as that I could, with my own hands, lay you on the rails there when the train was coming."

"Oh! it is worse than that to have to go back!" sobbed the girl, brokenly. "Lay me there. It were far better than that—that they should make me swear his life away. Oh! leave me here!"

Neil's answer to the confused words would hardly come. For the first time in his life he was weak with pity, and overcome by the longing to show a mercy which was foreign to him.

"When you have rested," he said, very gently, but still acting only as he chose, "you will see what an impossible request you make. You would have need to execrate me all your life if I left you here alone in London."

"Oh, I would rather," moaned Lina, too weak now even to sob, "I would so much rather stay here!"

"We are going home, dear little girl," he said, sorrowfully gazing into her entreating face, and addressing her (in his new character of protector) as he would have addressed a child, "and it will be all right for you then."

"Home!" she cried, with a sudden shiver; "I have no home. Every home that is given *me* is taken from me again. I have no home to go to; I only want to be away from *there*."

"But will you not trust those whose only wish—"

"You have always been cruel to me," she interrupted, desolately; "you are cruellest of all now."

"You are tired," he said, quite tenderly, but with no thought of giving up his own desire; "you do not see it all as you will see it to-morrow morning. Come; here is a snug sofa close to the fire."

In his new and easy assumption of authority, he made her rest there, putting his own fur rug about her; and then he went away, returning in a few minutes with a tumbler of hot wine-and-water, and a plate of delicately cut sandwiches. Other ladies sat about the room, but, even with their eyes upon her, Lina could not take the plate. She did put her cold lips to the glass, but hardly for more than an instant. Half a dozen eyes followed Sir Neil as he left the room again, and then turned inquisitively to the girl's beautiful pale face.

"On their wedding tour, and she's been taken ill. How unpleasant!"

"A petted and pampered girl, who likes the *rôle* of invalid in public, to exhibit the devotion of her handsome, strong young husband."

"Not married, and never will be. Well, she's pretty enough for any thing."

These the three remarks consequent on the scrutinizing of the six eyes, and about as true as are most of the blind remarks made upon fellow-travelers in the totally unsuggestive atmosphere of a waiting-room, enduring those interminable minutes between trains coming and trains going.

"Now, Miss Chester, this is our train."

Lina was leaning back in the corner of a couch, looking before her with eyes that saw nothing of this room and its occupants, when Sir Neil's quiet words aroused her. He had taken up the rug and thrown it over one arm, the other was offered her. Her steps tottered feebly as she rose—after the rest the weariness was more evident than before—but still she passed the offered hand again, and walked from the room as steadily as she could.

Once more, away from those staring eyes, she entreated to be left. But this entreaty was as unavailing as the last had been.

"Your seats, sir. I've taken care of them."

The porter, who had had the "grandee" in his eye all through the previous half-hour, came forward now, fearing that if the lady lingered there, the train might, after all, go without them. Such a pity as that would be, after taking four tickets!

In the farther corners of the carriage at which Sir Neil and Lina stopped, two ladies sat luxuriously buried in shawls and rugs; two quiet, experienced lady travelers.

"Now, lock the door," said Sir Neil, slipping a half-crown into the man's hand, when he and Lina were in, and he had again made her comfortable in his furs; "I have taken the rest of the carriage."

"I know, sir," put in the guard, coming up and turning the key; "I'm aware, sir. Have you all you need?"

"All right," curtly replied Sir Neil, who had piled the hot-water tins one upon another for a high foot-stool for Lina.

"Churchill you said, didn't you, sir? There's no need to bother you again until then. The other ladies go still farther north."

"Yes," answered Neil, who had taken care to ascertain this fact before he took Lina's place.

Then he settled himself in his seat, and opened the evening paper; and, somehow, as they sped on, Lina grew conscious how thoughtfully he was taking care of her through this journey. The presence of the ladies prevented any reference to exciting themes, and was, too, just the companionship she wished; yet it was a relief to know that no one else could join them, and no inquisitive eyes probe her as those had done at Euston. It was a great relief to her, too, that Sir Neil still lounged in his own seat, with his old lazy *insouciance*, the lappets of his high seal-skin cap down

over his ears, and the paper still held between his eyes and hers.

It was not until the night journey was nearly over that suddenly all this thought was effaced for a moment only by one chance glance at the quiet Saxon face. Oh! why was she there with him, going to help to kill Gerard? He was cruel to have brought her with him—cruel, as he always had been to her. He knew she was alone and unprotected. He knew she was in his power, and he had sought her out to give her the bitterest task of all her bitter life. He had been cruel to her always—always; even more cruel than he had been to every one else; selfish and heartless. He! The affianced husband of a lady a thousand times better and nobler and truer than himself; the son of the mistress who had paid her for her services just as she paid her servants; the man who had begged her to accompany him from his own house, where he was even then entertaining his betrothed wife! *He* to protect her now!

Care! what care had any one for her? Ah, if Rachel had only been spared! If Heaven did not always claim the good and merciful, and leave those who had no pity and compassion!

Athwart this dark, rebellious thought, there fell soft rays of light for Lina. She recalled the old woman in her cottage among the hills. She recalled Marjorie's warm, trustful sympathy. She recalled Colonel Stuart's goodness to her and to Gerard; but this thought bordered so closely on her one overmastering fear, that she hid her face in the corner of the carriage, and wept for the first time through all the hours of that interminable day.

Not one movement did Neil make toward her through this silent weeping, though it hurt and pained him as no woman's weeping had ever pained him in his life before. Not one word did he attempt of consolation or sympathy, and, for the first time, he acted with a real thoughtfulness in his courtesy.

"Churchill."

The name that had grown familiar to Lina through the past summer struck on her ear now like a knell.

"That's right," said Sir Neil, with an effort at cheeriness, as he rose and took the wraps gently from about Lina. "It is only just midnight now, Miss Chester; a tiresome journey, but it hasn't taken us very long, and—I declare here's Mrs. Esdaile."

The tone was the same tone throughout the speech, to all seeming light and cheering, though in reality anxious and troubled; but at the last words, uttered in feigned surprise, Lina's whole face brightened with a swift, sudden gladness; momentary only, perhaps, but so vivid that Neil, when he saw it, rejoiced in his heart that he had had the thought to telegraph to Stuart from Euston.

"I am so glad to have been here, Miss Chester," said Mrs. Esdaile, warmly taking her by the hand. "Sir Neil, you must tell Lady Athelston I have taken present possession of this tired girl. We have a much shorter drive before us than you have; besides, our brougham is here, and you will have to take a fly; and, besides," added the lady, with her pleasant tact, "I have Marjorie staying with me to-night at The Anchorage, and she would never forgive me if she heard I had met Miss Chester and not brought her to see her."

At the sound of Marjorie's name, Lina's clasp on Mrs. Esdaile's arm grew closer. "It seemed," as she said to her brother afterward, "like an appeal from the girl to be taken to Marjorie, and for a moment overcame the evident dread she felt of advancing even one step nearer to us who had brought her here, to meet what she shuns far more than death itself."

Sir Neil Athelston stood at the door of the brougham, talking quietly to Mrs. Esdaile on indifferent subjects. His eyes, every now and then, sought Lina's with swift intentness, and as they rested on her face (so pitifully pale in the lamplight) there grew in them that look of anxious earnestness which could chase away entirely their old sleepiness.

"You are sure you will not come, Athelston?" inquired Colonel Stuart, preparing to take his seat on the box, confident, before he asked, what the answer would be.

"Quite sure, thank you, Stuart. I shall see you to-morrow. Good-night, Mrs. Esdaile; thank you for—I mean, I'm very glad you chanced to be at the station. Good-night, Miss Chester—good-night."

And Sir Neil turned away, curbing his fierce, strong wish to linger still beside her; to have her under his protection longer; to claim the right of the one who had rescued her from her loneliness and danger. Dull and moody enough he felt as he drove home, in the very fly from The Leopard which had taken himself and Lina on the night when he first met her.

Cold and bleak as the night wind blew, Colonel Stuart faced it from the box-seat of his roomy brougham, leaving his sister to cheer Lina as her gentle, womanly tact and delicacy should prompt, and to say only just those few well-timed words which the girl could bear.

Lina listened gratefully, though she could not trust herself to speak. Here, beside her, was one new compassionate friend. In the warm, peaceful home to which they were taking her Marjorie awaited her—Marjorie, with her generous sympathy and gentle words. Ah, and she had murmured once, not long ago—not long ago, though it seemed like years and years—against Heaven's pity on the desolate!

All Gerard's brave and simple faith was hers just then. Even the dread of that coming trial left her for a little time. Sitting quite silent, her fingers locked in her lap, these thoughts of gratitude were so deeply heart-felt that they crept softly up into the starlit heaven like a prayer.

"Lina," said Marjorie, as the two girls sat before the fire in the pretty little room which had been prepared for Lina, "it's very late—I mean it's exceedingly early; but you are resting nicely on that big chair, aren't you? And I'm resting nicely here, so we won't hurry to separate just this minute. I expected that Mrs. Esdaile would make me promise not to come in here at all to-night, but she didn't, so I shall wait till it strikes one. Wasn't it a kind thought of Colonel— of Adelaide's, to send for me, Lina?"

"Very kind to me."

"You know I didn't mean that," was Marjorie's quick answer. "You know I meant that it was kind to *me*. Oh, Lina, if we could have helped it, you should not have returned—yet;

but, as you are come, it is so much best for you to be here, and I am glad to be with you. I have missed you sorely through all these long days."

"May I tell you of them?" asked Lina.

Now, Marjorie Castillain, though she looked so thoroughly comfortable and at home, wrapped in her dressing-gown, and with her slippered feet upon the fender, had her whole mind bent on solacing and cheering this solitary girl, and, anxious as she was herself, hid this, that she might succeed the better. She had not misinterpreted the pleading look which Lina had given her when she fancied they were separating for the night—it was seldom that the clear eyes did misinterpret any look of appeal—and her sure, true instinct told her what the mute prayer had been. Lina wanted to tell her where and how these two weeks had been spent. Perhaps, after that, another question—nearer her heart, but farther from her lips—would come more easily.

Yes, truly it did! When Lina had finished her short story—so much more sad and pathetic a one than she fancied—she turned to Marjorie, and asked this question in a whisper, with dry lips and hot, eager eyes,

"Miss Marjorie, what did they say—the magistrates, the sheriff, your sister? What was it? What was said of him? What was the—verdict?"

"The verdict will not be given yet, dear," replied Marjorie, her own face paling; "we have a long, long time to wait for that. Oh, a weary time! If we could only leap through these three months, how willingly would I forfeit them from my life!"

"Perhaps it is better so," whispered Lina, in a voice from which all hope and spirit seemed to have died. "Then, Miss Castillain, is he—oh, *you* say it—where is he?"

"In Bleaborough," said Marjorie, and the effort to speak cheerily was an utter failure now.

"You mean in jail?" was Lina's question, cold and slow in its anguish.

"Colonel Stuart goes to see him often, Lina," continued Marjorie, avoiding the direct answer, "and I'm going when you give me leave."

"Oh no! How could he bear it?" cried Lina, in the same slow voice.

"Bear it!" echoed Marjorie, with a warm, bright flash in her loving eyes. "He would bear it as he bears every thing—nobly, grandly, bravely. Oh, Lina, when I think of him now, my heart feels all hot and wrong and unbelieving! I think of that part of his life, years and years of a horrible, degrading labor, then a struggling existence in that comfortless, almost empty cottage, and now a maddening confinement and inactivity. I think of how he has worked; worked always, always; and never for himself, never for any luxury, or even comfort for himself, worked to clear his name, which was never tainted, and worked for the child whom he rescued from poverty and worse; the child who, sharing all he so hardly earned, has never heard one harsh word from his lips. I think of the woman who made his struggling life so much the harder to endure by her cankering, worrying temper, while all the time he had been the helper and consoler of her own child, and had given love and a home to her forsaken grandson. I think of the—the—of the man (I will say as little against him as I can, because he *may* be dead) to whom he owes this hard and solitary life, whose son it was he guarded, knowing him his son—*his* son! I think of how he worked and lived, Lina, always cheerful, always brave, always hopeful; yet never hearing one word of sympathy or encouragement, never having one loving glance to stimulate his earnest, busy hand. I think of all these things when I lie awake at night; or ride alone—as I've ridden miles and miles lately to baffle Neil in his search for you; or sit alone staring into the fire, where I see it plainest of all; and it makes my heart burn as it never burned before. Every thing seems confused; and—I want," added the girl, with great gentleness, "to tell him how the remembrance of his life has helped me in bearing— Ah, as if *I* had any thing to bear! The tiny clouds that fleck *my* sky are not troubles, I know it now; and I want to tell him of the one good which his story has taught me, because it was by his wish that it was told me."

"He will say you forget he is a prisoner—and for what," faltered Lina, raising her hands to cover her wide, aching eyes.

"He will not be changed by those prison walls," returned Marjorie, with tearful earnestness. "No four bleak, cruel prison walls could change him. He *must* have the bright bravery in his eyes, and the strong gentleness in his voice. That wretched cell, however wretched, can no more take the manliness from him than could that bare cottage room take from him his inborn gentlemanliness. Lina, you see I know your story now—yours and his; and—and does it pain you to hear that, even to me in my random selfishness, your brother's story has done good?"

Ah, at last the tender words have done their work; for the tears are falling now quite thick and fast from the tired eyes which had been so dry as she told her own tale.

"You know now, dear," resumed Marjorie, "that I have heard your story; but I think I trusted you so thoroughly, and loved you so well before, that I could not do it more. Lina, I promised him to take care of you if the power were ever given me. Colonel Stuart took the message; but I might easily promise what is such a pleasure to me, might not I?"

"I had meant to tell you our story to-night, Miss Castillain," said Lina, when the tears ceased, and she could speak again with calmness.

"And you see it is unnecessary," smiled Marjorie, with a warm, tender clasp about the slight, worn form; "Mr.—your brother—asked Colonel Stuart to tell it me every bit. Colonel Stuart knew who he was always—all through the summer. Did you guess that?"

Lina started.

"He knew!" she echoed, wonderingly; "and he so good to us both, so—*very* good to Gerard."

"He is always good," returned Marjorie, quietly; "but of course he was good when he knew all. He had never believed that first accusation against Gerard. Mr. Esdaile didn't believe it afterward, I understand. Mrs. Esdaile and Clara never had. Clara always loved you dearly, and often and often talked of you to her—husband. Colonel Stuart told me all this himself. Now I suppose I must go. I shall be scolded if I stay longer. Will you go to bed now, and don't think of rising in the morning until you have permission?"

"Miss Castillain," whispered Lina, looking up into her face as she rose, and speaking as if she felt the words a duty, "though Sir Neil *did* bring me back when I longed and prayed to stay, he—he did it very kindly and generously."

"Kindly and generously!" echoed Marjorie, the tone all scornful now, which had just been so soft and pitiful. "I'm sorry to hear he had the power even to do that. I hate to think of any power he has. You don't understand me, I see, but you will, poor child. I never thought of Neil's power until now; I should have laughed the idea to scorn if it had come before me. Now I am beginning to realize the power he does possess in this money-loving, title-worshiping place. Lina, I literally shiver when I think of influence and authority being placed in his lazy, selfish hands; just because he is sheriff of the county, and the Baronet of High Athelston; while, for all we know, the real baronet—oh, I can not talk of that! it makes me skeptical and cross, and all kinds of wrong things. Hush, my dear; don't cry so piteously. You will wear yourself entirely out. Good-night. Look at the time-piece, and promise me you will be in bed by two. Thank you, and so will I. Another kiss. Good-night, dear little friend."

CHAPTER XXXV.

WAITING FOR THE TRIAL.

ANOTHER illness was the forfeit Lina paid for that long day's wandering and anxiety; but tender hands led her back to health again, loving ones, too, though no ties of blood or relationship bound her to these true friends, any more than they had done to that old woman who had nursed her back to life, in the solitary cottage among the hills.

Marjorie was not staying at The Anchorage, "because the old folks at home find life unbearable without me," she told Lina, with the old merriment in her eyes, though they were dim with tears. So every day she went away, taking from the chamber where Lina lay the brightest and the warmest sunbeam which ever found its way thither. Every day, after sitting with Lina as long as she dared, she went away from the house altogether. And Lina found this out, and pondered it a good deal between her own sad thoughts of Gerard; but she never grew to understand it.

"Mrs. Esdaile," Marjorie said, with wistful merriment one morning, as she came in and found her lovingly administering some delicacy to Lina, "I wonder what I should have suffered all this time if I had had my first stupid, involuntary wish, and taken Miss Chester to Hawkedale. I could never have provided dainties for her. Didn't you feel sure of that, when papa told you he had a cook 'just to his mind,' and when Louisa said 'she did pretty well' (that is strong praise for Louie)?"

"Marjorie," inquired Mrs. Esdaile, feeling, as Lina did, the sunniness of the girl's presence, however much she might be shocked by her occasionally heedless words, "how is Louisa now? I don't mean in the matter of general health or culinary opinions, but with regard to her melancholy and her—"

"Her mischief," put in Marjorie, demurely; "I understand. She's pretty well, thank you, in both respects. Louisa, as you may have remarked, has an extraordinary power of condensation. She is succeeding now in condensing into her six-and-twenty years all the mischief which it takes an ordinary woman her whole threescore-and-ten to concoct."

And then the conversation drifted, as it very rarely did, into the one prominent and most serious thought of them all.

"There is no hope, then, of Louisa's relenting?" inquired Mrs. Esdaile, anxiously.

"No hope," was the unwilling reply; "and Neil is as selfish as ever, and Lady Athelston as insanely obstinate as ever; as mildly, as self-punishingly obstinate as ever."

"Still cries, and says how much she has been deceived, eh?" asked Mrs. Esdaile, smiling at Lina. "Quite natural for her, but not the teaching of her better nature, and we will wait until that again is paramount."

So Lina, through those days she spent so quietly in her own room, was not kept in the dark about what was said in the little world round Churchill. But what was told her was told in kindness to herself, as well as by those who never spoke of their own deeds; so that, after all, the greater part was hidden.

She was never told of the hard feeling which prevailed in the place against her brother, or of the unceasing endeavors of Colonel Stuart and Marjorie to change this. She knew that Lady Athelston resented the deceit that had been practiced upon her; but she had never been told what an attack of hysterics had seized her on Sir Neil's proposition that she should go to see Miss Chester, and how her very name was sowing dissension between the mother and son. She knew that Louisa Castillain was angry at her having been received back in Highshire at all; but she was never told of her untiring energy in pursuit of justice for Eustace Jelfrey's murderer; nor of the poisonous seeds of scandal against the murderer's sister, which she sowed broadcast with such pertinacious zeal. She knew that Colonel Stuart was often with Gerard, and used all the influence he possessed in the county in his favor; but she did not know how weak that influence proved, now that the mighty voice of an injured public was raised against the prisoner; and while the high-sheriff published among them his *debonnaire* assurance of the coming sentence.

"It is wearisome work, Adelaide," the colonel would say; "but I will not weary of trying, until it is too late for any effort to avail."

And his sister, smiling in proud confidence, would tell him that only one little turn was wanted, and then the scale of his influence—an influence which every one knew to be good and pure—would weigh this down at once.

"Only one little turn!" he would echo. "But what is to give that little turn, my dear?"

"Truth itself, as Marjorie says," laughed his sister, gently, "clear-seeing, far-seeing, pure-seeing Truth itself."

So Lina, seeing all just in that one ray of sunlight which kind friends let into her room, knew but little, after all, of the verdict uttered already by the busy world without.

When she got better and was able to walk,

Mrs. Esdaile and Marjorie took her away to Torquay; partly to recruit her strength, which was terribly wasted, and partly to strengthen her mental powers, which were oddly dazed and bewildered. Even when Mrs. Esdaile returned to her brother and little son, she left the girls there with a friend of her own; and Marjorie was intensely grateful for this.

"It must have been a joint idea," she said to Lina. "It is too kind a one even for Adelaide to have concocted alone."

And Lina had no need to ask whom she credited with the other half.

Once during the visit, Sir Neil Athelston came down to spend a day there.

"Naturally," remarked Marjorie, when she had read the note he sent to tell her that he was then at the hotel, and ask when he might see her —"naturally he finds the separation from me tedious, unbearable. Poor martyr! Lina, shall I read you my answer? Don't say *No;* I'm one of those small-minded girls who can not exist without reciprocity. Listen:

"'My dear Neil,—I wish you were at John-o'-Groats or the Land's End—I shouldn't care which. Miss Chester is not well enough to enjoy seeing visitors, and I am too well.—M. C.'

You see," she explained to Lina, raising her laughing eyes, "I had to think of an excuse for both, and so I employed the two opposites. Will that do?"

Lina laughed a little, and Marjorie had accomplished her aim. To lift sometimes the load of pain which was always pressing on the girl's heart was Marjorie's one constant aim.

Sir Neil did call, as Marjorie knew he would. "Unnatural," he said, unconsciously parodying the words of his betrothed, "that we should be separated all this time, and I not allowed to come and see you." But (and this Marjorie had never expected) he did not force his company on her at all, and behaved to Lina with an unobtrusive courtesy which (as Marjorie said to herself) almost amounted to thoughtfulness. And after that one visit, Sir Neil went back to Highshire, and troubled them no more.

"She will grow strong and well with Marjorie," he said to himself; "and I have seen her once again."

"Lina," said Marjorie, her eyes full of fun, "I've sent a message by Neil to ask the old folks at home to send me some spring dresses and money; isn't it a joke? I've told him to send me a sketch of Louie's expression, or papa's, when he gives it. You know they would not vex *him* for all the world, nor provide me with filthy lucre; so won't their inclinations be dislocated? Dear," she added, suddenly, "did you want to send for any thing?"

"No, thank you. Lady Athelston returned me my whole possessions at once," replied Lina, with a pained recollection of the dismissal which the act represented. "I am quite well supplied. I have—in that box she sent—all the money I—I had saved."

"I remember," whispered Marjorie; "saved for Gerard. What a pleasure that must have been, Lina! Oh, if I had a brother who loved me, I—I think I shouldn't mind my financial difficulties!"

And so the sad words ended in a little gentle laugh, as Marjorie tried that all their sad words should.

Colonel Stuart and little Jack came at last to fetch the girls home, and then there dawned that last day before the trial. How suddenly it seemed to come at last, after all the weary sighing for it, and counting the days that had to intervene!

Marjorie had been at The Anchorage all the afternoon, and the shabby phaeton had been sent for her. Then, in the darkness of the March night, James drove her away from the bright and happy home, where her thoughts still lingered.

"Marjorie, I thought I should see you. I have waited for you. Take my horse on, James, and I will drive your mistress."

It was Sir Neil Athelston who greeted her thus, at the gate of The Anchorage, and who took his seat beside her, with his old ease and air of proprietorship.

"Let the old pony go as slowly as you like, Neil," she said, absently; "there is nothing very cheering awaiting me at home; and it is a very dismal morrow that will dawn upon this gusty night."

"I'm more than willing, dear," said Neil, taking the pony as sleepily as possible along the dark highway. "How is—how are they all, Marjorie?"

"Mrs. Esdaile has had toothache for a few hours," returned the girl, with her old enjoyment of misunderstanding and provoking him, "but, fortunately, it is better now. Little Jack cut his finger about a week ago; but—don't you grow anxious about it?—under a strict diachylon *régime*, it has healed sufficiently for him to finish, with ease, a copy which I set him: 'Learning strengthens, refines, and elevates the mind.' But the cook is lying down with headache; caused, I fancy, by—"

"I don't want to hear about the servants," put in Neil, petulantly.

"I was just coming to the colonel when you interrupted me. He has not, that I know of, called in professional advice; so I hope—"

"Bother!" growled the young man, without a smile. "I've seen Stuart to-day. Never mind telling me about him, Marjorie."

"You asked about them all," was the girl's calm rejoinder, "and so I began to tell you."

"How is Miss Chester?" he inquired, knowing quite well that she had read his thoughts from the first; and so attempting no more roundabout methods of reaching the truth.

"How can you expect her to be?"

Something in her voice, it must have been, which made his next words almost apologetic as well as regretful.

"I'm very sorry she's subpœnaed for to-morrow, Marjorie. No one could be more sorry than I am."

"I'm sorry you were the cause of it," she answered, coldly. "Perhaps her coming back could not possibly have been prevented; but your bringing her could, and would have been, if you had had ever so little thought for *her* unmixed with thought for yourself."

"It would have made this difference," said Neil, a great wrath rising in his heart as he felt how daringly Marjorie put motives on his conduct which he never had the power of contradicting; "that she would have been left to starve and die—or worse—alone in London. She, with

her beauty and helplessness and poverty! Can you calmly think of it, Marjorie—you, a tender-hearted woman?"

"I suppose we never shall be able to put ourselves in each other's places," smiled Marjorie, looking into his face frankly and kindly for the first time for many months, "else, I suppose, Neil, I should not think quite the same of your part in this. I wish I could. I can not bear to go on thinking of you as selfish and cruel."

"Thank you," he answered, in a voice of pain, not irony. "Even without the power of putting myself in your place, I can appreciate fully all the goodness of your acts, Marjorie dear. *You* have always been good to her."

"It was not goodness," the girl answered, almost sadly; "perhaps it was as much selfishness as yours. All I do, or could do, for her she deserves from me, for the lessons she has been unconsciously teaching me."

"But I may thank you, mayn't I?" the young man asked, turning to her earnestly as they drove down between the great old limes of Hawkedale, weird-looking in the light of the passing lamps, "because she has been, as it were, under our protection — my mother's and mine — and ours ought to have been the home to shelter her now."

"Better as it is," said the girl, curtly, her eyes aflame at his last lame speech, "better for her, better for us, better for you."

"But I must do something."

"Of course," returned Marjorie, coldly, "your protection is indispensable; you always felt that. Just wait till to-morrow is over, then claim your privilege. If the brother is condemned, surely it will be a consolation to the sister to feel that the high-sheriff is more merciful than the judge, and offers *her*, at any rate, an entire absolution."

"Don't be sarcastic to-night, Marjorie," pleaded Sir Neil, with an earnestness which was foreign to his usually lazy tones; "I am as miserable as she is herself. You win all her gratitude, I all her contempt. I own it is natural, but still it is rather less easy to bear than you can imagine. Where — where you wish to please, it is hard to find that you always hurt."

"Neil," inquired Marjorie, abruptly, "how long is your mother going to persist in her inveterate anger against Miss Chester?"

"I don't know," he said, and as he spoke the lamp-light showed a real anxiety on the face she had always known so careless; "I have told you again and again that I think *you* could convince her, if you would try."

"I won't go to her again to try," was the quick answer. "I said I would not until the trial was over, and I will not. She was unpersuadable and hard and dogmatic in her arguments, as only a woman can be. I said I wouldn't encourage her again to say things that put me in a passion, and made her bellow—oh yes, she did bellow, Neil; don't interrupt. So I've never been but that once, and I don't intend to plead for Miss Chester again, until to-morrow is over. Surely the horrible farce can not last longer than one day."

"You never break your word, Marjorie; so it is of no use asking you."

"No use, Neil," she interrupted, impetuously; "but oh, I do break my word; I've broken it a hundred times since" (she checked herself hurriedly)—"since I made even that one resolution. But I have not broken it in that. I will not stoop again to Lady Athelston. Miss Chester can live without your mother as well as without my sister. Let them go."

"Polite," smiled Neil. "But do you change your opinions, if you do not break your word, or do you still think—"

"I still think every thing I used to think," the girl answered, hastily; "I still think I would give all I have (though that isn't much) if you and I hadn't been so idiotic as to go into the rectory study that day with Louisa. Oh, if I had but been miles away! It seems that every body is to be able to tell something to help on that one story, and is to be made to do it, too! And foremost of all, Neil, I still think Eustace Jelfrey is not dead."

"Ah, Marjorie," he said, gently, "the very way you say it betrays how weak your belief really is. You have no confidence in your own opinion. No; the impossibility of such an idea must be patent to us all by now."

"Good-night," she struck in, abruptly: "don't come in. I don't want to hear Louisa talk about to-morrow, and I don't want to talk about to-day. I have fancied all day that I could hear the Bleaborough bells and the trumpets—deafening farce! Good-night."

She stood upon the steps, looking after him as he rode away.

"Poor Neil!" she said to herself, with a smile and a sigh together, "will any thing ever teach him how to act in real, noble self-forgetfulness? I feel so often maddened by him, yet never hopeless. The idea of Lady Athelston's old fallacy that *I* do him good! I—think of it! I wonder what good I could ever do any one, even if I loved them, and I suppose that is the motive-power most wanted. If I loved Neil, should I be less miserable to-night than I am, or more so? I wonder. And if I loved—"

Even the unbreathed thought was not finished. Standing there in the hush and darkness of the night — standing there alone and unseen — the color yet rose slowly and vividly in Marjorie's cheeks; and, knowing what thought had summoned it, she put up both her hands to hide it, sobbing as she never sobbed when any eyes could see, or ears could hear her.

And Neil went slowly on his way back to High Athelston, thinking, more than he imagined, about the girl who had dismissed him so suddenly; but for such thoughts she might have been glad and grateful in her heart.

"I, too, wish that to-morrow were over," he said to himself, as the gates of High Athelston were locked behind him, "or that they had picked Burton for high-sheriff instead of me. Yet I don't know why I mind," he added, almost savagely, as he cantered on. "A nice thing if the laws are to be broken, and life taken with impunity, under our very eyes!"

And a few minutes afterward he was listening, half amused and half indifferent, to the rehearsal of the pageant which was to go from High Athelston on the morrow.

"We had to-day the best show there's been in Bleaborough since last an Athelston was high-sheriff," the servant said, as the baronet turned away; "yet he doesn't seem to care about it. I thought he wasn't going to give the orders at all for to-morrow."

"My lady was waiting up to see Sir Neil, if he would be good enough to step into her dressing-room."

He *was* good enough to step into her dressing-room; and there he saw her, sitting fretfully beside the fire, chafing at his delay, and at Fletcher's awkwardness, and at a fancied accumulation of minor miseries.

"It was never so when Miss Chester was here," thought Neil, the long, lazy eyes taking their intent brightness even at this momentary thought of Lina, and the thought giving him patience enough to listen in silence for ten minutes to Lady Athelston's complaints. But when these all resolved into one tearful, injured complaint of the companion in whom she had "blindly trusted," and been "basely deceived," he spoke, rousing himself from his indolence.

"Was this all you had to say, mother?"

"No; I wanted to speak about to-morrow," she whined, taking his hint; "I must have Marjorie to go with me. You can not sit with me in the court, and so I must have Marjorie."

"You quite intend to go, then?"

"Of course I intend to go. Of course it is my duty to go," she said, querulously, "you high-sheriff, and—and the trial affecting one who has been in our service. Of course I must go, but I can not go without Marjorie."

Marjorie's prolonged coolness and absence from High Athelston had worried Lady Athelston more than she would have told, and to go without Marjorie into the crowded town and court to-morrow was more than she could have attempted. Why, people might actually say that the match between her son and Miss Castillain was broken off, or something equally absurd and untrue; and no one knew what harm might come of such reports with such a girl as Marjorie, whose freaks no one could so much as pretend to understand.

"Marjorie told me she would go with you, mother," said Neil, speaking into the uplifted trumpet, "and I promised that you would drive round for her. Louisa is going with the Burtons, she hopes; she finds them kindred spirits more than ever now."

Lady Athelston breathed freely again. Her mind was set at rest on its most anxious point; a great load (for her who had no loads to bear but those of her own raising) had been lifted, and she could afford to be a little harmlessly vicious now—a grand resource of the selfish when their own personal plans have taken a favorable turn, and relieved them from any pressing anxiety.

"I shouldn't think of going without Marjorie, Neil," she said, in a melancholy tone of resignation; "but it will be very painful in any case."

Neil shivered in anticipation of the inevitable, unsubdued sobbing to which she was accustoming him. "I don't know how I shall bear to look at that deceitful girl, who let me confide in her, and pretended—"

"For Heaven's sake, mother, don't be a fool!" spoke Neil, angrily. "If you don't care about Miss Chester, what's the use of crying over her, and making such a ridiculous scene? If you do care about her, what's the use of calling her names?"

He rose as he spoke, and walked away, thinking again how much more smoothly life had passed, and how much more bright the great house had felt, when Lina Chester's beautiful face and dainty figure were to be met about it. Ah, how wan and hopeless was the beautiful face just then; how drooping and tired the dainty figure!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

That afternoon, while Marjorie was at The Anchorage, Louisa Castillain, entering the drawing-room in her walking-dress, rang impatiently for tea.

"Bring it at once," she said to the antiquated butler who answered her summons—"for myself alone. It is no use waiting for Miss Marjorie, and I am in a hurry to go—into the town."

The hesitation was not caused by Louisa's unwillingness to utter the falsehood, only by her being unprepared with it.

"I think James has orders to fetch Miss Marjorie from The Anchorage at nine, ma'am," said the old man. "She walked there this afternoon, but he was to take the phaeton to-night."

"Tell James," put in Miss Castillain, as if Miss Marjorie's orders were matters too small to interest her, "to have the phaeton ready for me in ten minutes."

"Will you return for dinner, ma'am?" inquired the butler, with the air of wishing to know what covers to lay, but with the real design of making sure that the carriage would be at liberty for Miss Marjorie, as she wished.

"I ordered dinner for two, did I not?" returned Miss Castillain, carelessly; "your master and myself. Now, do not delay with my tea."

During the few minutes that intervened between the man's dismissal and his return with the tray, Louisa paced to and fro upon the worn old hearth-rug, looking a model of petulant impatience. But when, beside her cup, she caught sight of a small note addressed to herself, her whole face brightened.

"When did this come?" she inquired, as she took it up.

"Now, ma'am, as I was coming in. The footman did not wait, as there was no answer."

Something in the few lines Lady Helen Burton had written to her friend gave that friend an extra relish for her tea. She read the note over three or four times, before she slowly folded the coroneted sheet and replaced it in its envelope; and, while she did so, a smile, pleased and congratulatory, though somewhat sinister, played round her small, well-shaped lips.

"*That* is all right," she muttered, as she rose and drew on her gloves, standing before the glass, and regarding complacently her high black hat and fair, handsome face; "that is all right, so far."

"What brought one of the Burton Park servants here, Louisa?" inquired her father, in his sharp, abrupt voice, as he entered the room. "Has the earl sent me a message, as he could not be in Bleaborough to-day, or is it only some rubbish between yourself and Lady Helen?"

"Helen mentions neither her father nor mother," returned Louisa; "she only writes to me about to-morrow. The earl and countess are not going into Bleaborough for the trial, so Helen

writes to say that I must drive with her and her brother, and they will come round here for me. I had hoped so."

"That's right," put in Mr. Castillain, rubbing his hands; "I don't wish to have out the britzska; it will want repairing soon, if we use it much now. Marjorie is sure to go with the Athelstons, and I ride."

"How early you came home, papa!" remarked Louisa, lingering a little to hear what he had to say. "I fancied you would stay to dine with the judges."

"Not very likely, when I went in on horseback, and took no dress; besides, I had work I wanted to overlook here. I shall have my hands full for the next two hours."

"And was it a pleasant sort of day?" inquired Miss Castillain, with inquisitive enjoyment; "and did the bells ring madly? The Bleaborough bells are so beautiful, and I haven't heard them for so long! And what sort of a man is the judge who will try the criminal cases?"

"Much the same as other judges," returned Mr. Castillain, curtly.

"And had Sir Neil four horses to his own carriage? And did he and Mr. Jorden drive with the judges? And how did it all look?"

"Much as it has looked as long as I can remember," was the answer, "except that Athelston is more of a fool than most high-sheriffs, and makes a greater parade."

"His full-dress liveries are gorgeous; aren't they, papa?"

"Don't get excited about it," her father answered, chillily; "other Athelstons have been fools before him; they always turn out their men like royalty. Rubbish it is! He has a fine troop of servants, though, and as handsomely mounted a set of tenants as one need see."

"And did many personal friends attend, papa?"

"Plenty, both in carriages and on horseback. What! you stick to this nonsense, do you?" he added, looking crossly down upon the tea equipage. "I really think, Louisa, that you might dispense with such extravagance as that; and a fire, too, on this warm day!"

"Helen says, papa," put in Louisa, dutifully turning aside his remark, while the March wind shook the casement, "that her brother declares there is not the slightest chance of the verdict to-morrow being any thing but guilty."

"We know that, without her information," retorted the old gentleman, testily. "When a murder—or manslaughter, if you choose—is witnessed, what doubt can there be of the verdict of twelve sensible men?"

"Of whom you are one," smiled Louisa. "Papa, I should like to be on the grand jury."

"Should you? I doubt whether the other eleven would care about it. But there's nothing curious in the viscount's considering the verdict settled. Bless me, what news is that? Where are you going?"

"To High Athelston, papa," replied Louisa, hastening away now, for fear of further questioning. "I shall be back in time for dinner. I never keep you waiting, do I? I leave that for Marjorie."

"Drive me up Nether Lane, to the private entrance into Athelston Park," was Louisa's order to the coachman, "and leave me there. I intend to walk home."

From the green door in the high gray wall, James turned the old pony, and drove straight to The Anchorage. He might just as well stay there, he thought, until Miss Marjorie was ready. It was a pleasant place to stay at, as all the Hawkedale servants knew.

But James and the phaeton were no sooner safely out of Miss Castillain's sight than she followed them, slowly and cautiously, without having entered the park at all.

Down the lane, between the overarching elms, she loitered until she reached the two cottages standing together; then she turned in at Mrs. Cheere's gate, and walked up the garden with a tired, languid step. Dorcas slowly opened the door upon her.

"I want to ask you to allow me to rest a few minutes," began Louisa, in her most insinuating tones. "I persisted in walking from High Athelston, and I feel quite tired already."

"'Tisn't far, either," put in Mrs. Cheere, rather icily.

"Not very far, as you say," returned Louisa, forcing a conciliatory smile, "but I suppose I am out of practice for walking any distance. I declined to drive home, and now I repent my obstinacy."

"Obstinate people aren't those that generally repent most, either. Will you sit down, Miss Castillain?"

That sounded quite gracious from Dorcas, and Louisa glanced at her with a similar graciousness, but she saw no unbending of the woman's normal rigidity.

"I see you have Mr. Spendir's boy with you still, Mrs. Cheere," she said, glancing to where Jet stood quietly washing up the tea-things while Dorcas dried them. "How kind it is of you to keep him *still*!"

Louisa emphasized the "still" pleasantly and admiringly; but she knew, as well as Marjorie did, the whole story of Mrs. Cheere's connection with the child, and the child's claim upon her.

"Yes, at present," returned Dorcas, shortly.

"Poor Lady Athelston is very much distressed about this trial to-morrow," began Miss Castillain, conjecturing that her listener's attention would immediately be won by mention of that lady's name.

But Dorcas stolidly awaited further information, and at present vouchsafed no remark.

"It is a most distressing thing," continued Louisa, "for one in her position to have been subjected to such an imposture, and to have to be now associated by name with such a person as Miss Chester must be."

"Very distressing," assented Dorcas, quite promptly now.

"And connected — through her—" continued Miss Castillain, greatly encouraged, "with a criminal."

"Mr. Spendir?" inquired Dorcas, with liveliness. "Yes, but my lady, nor none of us, won't be troubled long with *him*."

Keen and searching was Miss Castillain's glance into the woman's face, then her lips rippled into a satisfied smile.

"Even your evidence would insure that, would it not, Mrs. Cheere?" she asked, plausibly. "But I, too, think it a privilege to be instrumental in bringing such a criminal to justice, and freeing nervous people from being imposed upon or terrified."

"It's our duty to tell the truth," remarked Dorcas, stonily; "of course we like to do it, and to punish any criminal we've been unfortunate enough to be living near for a time."

"I fancy that the words you and Mr. Jelfrey overheard would be quite as effectual in proving him guilty as my witnessing the crime itself," Louisa said, placidly; "at any rate, Mrs. Cheere, I look upon you as the one who will most nearly share with me the task of exposing guilt. I am so glad to know that you look upon this task in the same light as that in which I myself see it. I know you do, Mrs. Cheere?"

The words were put as a question, graciously and rather flatteringly, and Dorcas answered them, though with a curt acidity.

"I'm glad enough to tell the truth. I'm not going to say any thing but the truth. No fear, Miss Castillain; it isn't my custom. Didn't I direct the police to him myself, and tell them all I had heard him say—every thing? So, even if I'd a wish to eat my words, I couldn't, after that; at least, it wouldn't be any use trying. I've not lived near that man for six months for nothing, and I'll—I'll tell the truth of him, whether it brings him to the gallows or not. I shall be on my oath, as many of us will, and it isn't very likely I'd perjure myself for such as he."

"Indeed, no one could ever dream of your doing that," said Louisa, eagerly; "no one would ever dream it of you, any more than of me, Mrs. Cheere. But I must really go, pleasant as it is to rest here. I can not indulge myself any longer."

Louisa rose, making her adieus—as Marjorie would have said, "with painful gush."

"The poor little boy, too," she remarked, with gentle commiseration; "his evidence would be almost sufficient without ours, would it not? And the other child's, too; I'm very sorry for them both."

"They're young to come forward in a court of justice," remarked Dorcas, stiffly; "still, it can't harm them. Are you rested, Miss Castillain?"

"Oh yes, thank you," smiled Louisa, "very much rested; and I may meet the carriage from home, perhaps. Good-evening, Mrs. Cheere."

Relieved of an anxiety which had been worrying her more than she would have cared to acknowledge, Louisa tripped along the lane, while Dorcas turned silently to resume her washing.

Jet tried to feel his way to a little conversation, less to relieve the monotony of his occupation than to hide from Mrs. Cheere the two great globular tears which had risen to his eyes as he listened to Miss Castillain.

"Didn't she look ill when she first came in?" he asked, as he deftly put the plates into a heap.

"She looked," said Dorcas, conclusively, working a little faster than usual, and, if possible, more grimly, "as if she'd been boiled and put away to eat cold; that's how she looked when she first came in. Now, put those things up, child, and don't chatter any more."

So the pair went on in silence with their small duties, while Louisa walked gayly and hastily on to Hawkedale, and was in good time to take her place at the head of her father's table. It was not either a sumptuous or cheerful table, but Louisa was not aware of any deficiency, and Mr. Castillain apparently enjoyed his haricot as much as he could possibly have enjoyed the varied repast which he might have shared, in Bleaborough, with the judges and his county neighbors.

The father and daughter were still sitting over their wine—it was the very mildest sherry, but Louisa would not on any consideration have foregone her languid enjoyment of it—when Marjorie came home, her face unusually pale.

"Did Athelston reach The Anchorage before you left?" inquired her father.

"No."

"He told me he should leave the town as early as he could, and that he wanted to see Mrs. Esdaile. Then you haven't seen him?"

This was a different question.

"Yes, I've seen him, papa."

"And what did he say?"

"A variety of interesting things," returned the girl, flushing nervously.

"I've no doubt," said the old gentleman, with a laugh which testified to his real enjoyment of the idea, but which made Marjorie wince; "I've no doubt of it. I don't wish to probe into your affectionate secrets; I only mean, what did he say about the dinner?"

"I think he had forgotten it," replied Marjorie, her lips twitching a little at the corners.

"What did he say about to-morrow?" put in Louisa. "Will it be a trying day to him, as well as to us all? Horrible it is," she sighed, "to be mixed up in such an affair—a most degrading thing for us Castillains."

"Otherwise immaculate." (It was Marjorie who capped the speech so promptly.) "We come of a splendid old stock, don't we, Louie? But we are rather a sort of potato crop, the best part of us is under-ground. I believe there were some Castillains worth picking up in the last century."

"Don't hesitate about insulting *me*, Marjorie," spoke her sister, resignedly; "but I think you might stop and consider before you insult your own father. It will be well, I'm sure, when this trial is over, for your temper has been getting more and more unbearable every month since that man was taken up. After to-morrow, perhaps, we shall have a little peace. You can not excite yourself about a condemned criminal."

"If—"

The word came involuntarily from Marjorie's lips; then she paused in sudden consciousness of how little her sister would understand the speech she had begun. "There's no 'if' in the case," laughed Louisa, "every one says it. You know that Neil says the same, only you will not acknowledge it."

"What's the use of trial by jury, if every ignoramus knows the verdict beforehand?" asked the younger sister, angrily. "Besides, I may say 'if,' if I like, a dozen, and a hundred times. I like 'if.' I say, with Touchstone, 'Much virtue in if!'"

"Papa says," persisted Louisa, with a smile, "that by this time to-morrow there won't be a dissentient voice about the man's guilt."

"How can there be," inquired Mr. Castillain, conclusively, "when it is the truth; and plenty of clever men are here to disclose and sift and pronounce that truth?"

"But even clever men, papa, ever so clever," said Marjorie, gently, "may construe a thing in utterly different ways, either by chance or will."

"There's no fear of things being construed unfairly, at any rate," interposed the elder sister, as she rose from her chair. "The counsel—not to speak of the judge and jury—will see this whole thing in a moment. Rest satisfied with that, Marjorie, my dear."

"Don't put me down as if I were a baby," exclaimed the girl, rising too, her eyes flashing passionately. "I have different ideas of justice from you. I'm thankful to say so. Be quiet."

Louisa smiled compassionately. "I hope your behavior will be a little improved when this man's last degradation is over," she said, as she left the room.

"It won't be any degradation," cried the younger girl, with a stamp of her foot, and a hot color flaming in her cheeks. "That trial to-morrow won't be a bit of degradation. Shakspeare knew better than you do, and he says it's the heretic that *makes* the fire, not he that burns in it. Don't talk any more to me."

"You are a little goose, Marjorie," put in her father, pettishly. "Run away to your tea, and leave these matters to the lawyers."

"I could almost say, papa," the girl said, hesitating still with him, in her unwillingness to join her sister, and looking into his face with eyes half defiant and half wistful; "I could quite say with Cade—wasn't it?—'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.'"

Mr. Castillain laughed his short, grating laugh, but all he said was, "That shows how unsteady all your confidence is, child; and I advise you not to begin making these random speeches to Athelston."

On her way to the drawing-room, Marjorie stopped before the great carved oak clock in the hall. A long while she stood, and the steps that passed (as the old butler went to and fro) never roused her.

"Twelve hours more before day begins," she whispered to herself, at last, as she turned away, "and then the vast, immense day itself; and then— But I think almost any thing on earth is easier to bear than doubt."

That last day of suspense was dying in its midnight hush.

At Hawkedale, Louisa Castillain was sleeping the untroubled sleep of the innocent; while Marjorie (tossing wakefully upon her pillows) still tried to think that thought she had so often whispered to herself, that any thing was easier to bear than doubt—forgetting how doubt is the shadow of hope itself.

At High Athelston, Lady Athelston had fallen asleep placidly, in the consciousness that she should have Marjorie to lean upon on the morrow—Marjorie, who (she tried to believe) had always been a better prop for her than the girl on whom she had relied for a time so blindly. While Neil, sitting moodily before his fire, chafed impatiently at one thought only, the sorest thought of all to his proud, high-bred nature. Could he bear to see the beautiful, delicate, timid girl he loved exposed upon the morrow to the broad gaze, and free remarks, and coarse suspicions of a crowded court, with no one near her who had the right to support, or help, or encourage her? Could he bear to see the pain upon her face, and the fear? Could he bear it, if her evidence helped to bring in the damning verdict which so surely must be brought? Could he bear it, knowing that he—the reigning baronet of High Athelston—had chosen this girl to love, and must even choose to love her still, through all this degradation?

At the cottage in Nether Lane, Jet lay crying quietly upon his small, wet pillow; trying hard to suppress his sobs, for fear of their being heard and objected to in the next room—in the next room, where Dorcas, with her hard hands tight upon her face, knelt in the darkness.

At The Anchorage, Colonel Stuart sat writing fast, and thoroughly engrossed. Little Jack had cried himself to sleep in his soft white bed; and from one window, Lina Chester looked out into the thick darkness of the March night, seeing—as she always fancied she saw in light and darkness, by day or night, as it had been five years before—one prison cell; and her hands ached in the anguish of their clasp, as she pictured the change which these slow months had wrought in the dauntless heart and the brave face she loved so dearly.

And so around them all deepened the silence and the darkness of that night upon which was to dawn the day of Gerard's trial.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

The Bleaborough Assize Court had not been so crowded since an assize nearly twenty years before, when a murderer (now standing in pale and ferocious effigy at Madame Tussaud's) was tried for a crime which made all England ring with execration upon his name. By ten o'clock there was left no standing-space throughout the whole building, save where it had been specially reserved.

There were two or three reasons why this trial should excite so much attention; chief among them the fact of the prisoner being no common man ("an artist and a gentleman," it was said), and of so many distinguished people being mixed up in the affair. Bleaborough was not often favored with the trial of a *gentleman*, either for willful murder or manslaughter, where the witnesses nearly all belonged to the county families, and where even the high-sheriff was himself served with a subpœna; so Bleaborough might well be excused for exciting itself unusually, and for crushing itself indefatigably in its untiring efforts to obtain seats in the criminal court.

Down from the jail, through the swaying crowd, came the close van, with its barred window and its guard of police; and suggestive jests were hurled jauntily at its invisible occupants, as it turned under the archway at the back of the Assize Court.

And presently, round to the front entrance, drove the sheriff's splendid carriage, and the burly, scarlet-robed figure of the judge issued therefrom into the midst of obsequious servants and officials. He and the sheriff entered the court together, and to both of them the room seemed already a mass of restless faces.

Sir Neil's eyes ranged along the crowded gallery and about the building, intent and anxious. Where was she? He saw her at last, sitting beside Mrs. Esdaile, near the witnesses, but it was

many minutes before he could bear to look into her face after he had discovered her. Cool and self-satisfied as he seemed in his dignity, his heart thumped heavily when he saw her, sitting bowed and pale, her eyes fixed upon her brother's face, so sadly hopeless and piteous in their gaze, and filled with such great yearning and great love.

Neil gazed from her to Mrs. Esdaile, almost appealingly, and the watchful, careful tenderness of that lady's face and manner gave him a feeling as nearly approaching to gratitude as were any of the feelings to which he was accustomed. Then he gave a glance into the face of the man who stood alone in the railed-off space nearly in the centre of the court. One glance only, and his lips curled; though something that felt like pity began even then to stir his heart.

He an Athelston! Standing there, a prisoner at the bar, to answer for the deadliest crime a man can commit; he to call himself an Athelston! How scornfully this crowd would jeer, if they could know whose name this murderer claimed!

Neil started, finding that he was losing the address for the prosecution. Yes, he had entirely lost the opening. The prisoner had been banned as a forger, and as a convict returned with a ticket of leave nearly two years before. Every thing suspicious in his previous life had been related in its worst aspect, before the sheriff's attention was won entirely to the case. Then he listened, moodily and contemptuously, while the prisoner's guilt was made evident; terribly evident to the dullest comprehension in the court, as guilt can be made by a barrister only; and all the time, he was watching intently the listening faces.

Seated together in the best position in the court were Lady Athelston and Marjorie. Marjorie's head was not bowed like Lina's, nor were her eyes fixed yearningly upon the prisoner; yet there was something in the girls' faces which made them strangely alike to Neil, though the touch of sympathy which would have explained the likeness to him he could not understand.

A very tiresome companion was Lady Athelston to the girl beside her; she perpetually wanted to be enlightened on some particular point (rendered impossible by her deafness), got terribly excited when Louisa Castillain appeared in the witness-box, and gave promise at last of an irrepressible attack of hysterics. Marjorie was struck with a new idea to quiet her. She wrote a few words rapidly on her tablets, and passed them on. They were:

"Neil is looking angrily across at us. He means that we are not to talk or make a sensation; we will discuss it all quietly at home afterward."

Lady Athelston nodded assent to this, and sat quite still, silenced by the wholesome awe of her son's displeasure, looking admiringly over to where he sat, with folded arms and contemptuous lips, as he listened to Miss Castillain's evidence, so coldly, clearly, and circumstantially given. Marjorie listened too, her eyes dark with passion, and the brows drawn down close above them.

Colonel Stuart sat with his head leaning on his hand, and never once looked up. Jack Esdaile stood beside his uncle, listening eagerly, while his breathing grew quick and irregular. Louisa had nearly reached the end of her long, unhurried narrative; had described vividly the murder she had witnessed in the valley, when the prisoner had deliberately flung deceased into the mine, and then fled; and was just volunteering the information that the woman who had for many months lived next door to the prisoner, had, some time before, overheard him threaten to kill deceased, when there was a slight commotion in the court—only a slight one, half contemptuous, half pitiful.

"Nothing, my lord, except that the prisoner's boy has fallen forward in a swoon."

"The crush and heat, of course. Take him out into the air," some one said; but the woman who sat beside him raised him coolly, and settled his head against her shoulder.

"He's as well here as he'll be outside," she said, taking no further notice. "It had nothing to do with the crush and heat."

Upon the little resting figure and ashy white face the prisoner's eyes were fixed with anxious tenderness. Marjorie, burning, and even trembling, with shame and anger as she listened to her sister's narration, saw this, and hid her own face from the crowd. Then little Jack Esdaile was taken to the witness-box, and he told the facts almost exactly as Miss Castillain had told them; only that somehow the words seemed all different as they passed his twitching, sorrowful lips.

"I didn't like Mr. Jelfrey, although he was my tutor," spoke the boy, in an unexpected and unorthodox burst of confidence; "and I did like Mr. Spendir very, very much. He was always kind and good to us boys. Mr. Jelfrey was always hard and disagreeable to us, unless grown-up people were by."

Jack was here given to understand that his opinions on the subject had not been requested; and, blushing hotly in his confusion, he rejoined Colonel Stuart.

"Have I done very badly, Uncle Alick?" he whispered, anxiously.

"You have done all you could, I suppose, Jack," was the answer. "I have but little hope, though."

"Marjorie, Marjorie, who is this?—who is this next witness?"

Lady Athelston was leaning forward on her seat, in an attitude of attention which the knowledge of her deafness made it rather piteous to see. Marjorie wrote down Jet's name, not trusting herself even to raise her eyes, which were bright and excited now behind their gathering tears.

A slight, sympathetic motion again in the crowded court, as the child was taken to the witness-box; so ill he looked, so cowed and really terrified. He repeated the oath slowly, then kissed the book with stiff, white lips.

Yes, he had been in the valley in the afternoon of the 12th of November. He supposed it was the 12th he meant. He was with Miss Castillain and Master Esdaile; Miss Castillain had met them just before, and turned with them to go home together. He had seen—by the pool—

The words, each an agonized whisper, here broke off entirely, and the rest was wrung from him by questioning.

Yes, he had seen the prisoner fling the deceased into the pool. "I only thought it was a pool," volunteered the child, with a flash of sudden, nervous courage, "and dad only thought it was

a pool. We didn't know about a mine." Yes, he saw Miss Chester run toward prisoner—the questions helped him on again now that the short-lived courage had died in its sudden flash—she looked terrified. She seemed as if she was going to stop him, but she was too late. No; prisoner had not seen any of them, he was quite sure; he had not even seen Miss Chester, who had run toward him. She fell down when deceased was thrown into the water, and Miss Castillain had ridden away very fast, and then they two had followed and ridden straight to The Anchorage.

After this, there was a strict cross-examination for the child to undergo; and then, before he left his place, the prisoner was asked if he wished to question this witness. No, he had no need to do so, he answered, gazing for a long minute into the face of the frightened child with just that old tenderness in his eyes which made them so warmly beautiful.

Mr. Jorden was examined next, and then his daughter; and their evidence only confirmed entirely, as far as it went, the deposition of Louisa Castillain. And so, indeed, did Sir Neil Athelston's when he took Miss Jorden's place; only that he added (with an easy, intent glance into Fitz Spendir's face) that he had reason to know that deceased ("Ah," thought Marjorie, "if they would only find other names now!") hated the prisoner, and wished him out of the country. Evidently Sir Neil Athelston felt that his opinion had its weight; but no other words did he vouchsafe, either in favor of the criminal, or in disparagement of the man who was spoken of as dead.

"I have known the prisoner intimately for a year"—it was Colonel Stuart who was speaking now, and after his simple testimony as to the correctness of the preceding statements, his grave, clear tones carried a strange force with them, simple and incisive—"and I have learned to respect him thoroughly. During all that time, he has worked hard, executing orders for myself and a few of my friends round Churchill, and most of the money which he earned he has been putting by toward paying off what he considered a debt to my sister's husband; that sum for which the learned prosecutor says Mr. Esdaile's name was forged five years ago, the sum for which deceased, I have now reason to believe, drew a check which, by a plausible lie, he induced the prisoner to cash. I have known Gerard Dymocke, through my late wife's memory, for six years; and, besides this, by my own personal knowledge I have proved him to be an honorable man, in the very highest and deepest sense of the word. He spent last summer in hard, incessant work, doing no act, even saying no word, which could injnre the man who had destroyed his prospects and his good name. When the two men met, on the day that the last, if not the greatest, insult had been offered from the prosperous man to the struggling and suffering one—met alone in the solitude—was it wonderful that they should fight, as men do fight after an injury, gaining generally credit rather than blame? And as they chanced to meet on the brink of that water, of the treachery of which prisoner knew nothing, was it natural that he should go out of his way to avoid being near it? Was the circumstance of his going straight home from the lake a sign that he felt he had deliberately committed a deed for which he could be lawfully punished with death?"

This Colonel Stuart asked with a simple, straightforward earnestness which had its full weight; yet, after all, was but little to weigh against the testimony of those who had seen the deed perpetrated.

"Marjorie, Marjorie, how absent you seem!" fretted Lady Athelston, in a whisper. "Is Colonel Stuart's evidence helping to hang that poor creature?"

"Hush!" cried the girl, in a sharp, pained whisper, of which her companion was happily unconscious.

"Oh, Marjorie, I'm afraid you have to go now," whined Lady Athelston. "Make haste, my dear, back to me. Don't stay to say much. I shall be so nervous."

Marjorie, as she rose, gave a smile down into the weak, pleading face; but it was not like Marjorie's brilliant smile: it was cold and sad and tired.

And now Marjorie stood in the witness-box, with hundreds of eyes upon her, and hundreds of ears waiting for her version of this story, waiting for her to indorse or confute her sister's statement.

But Marjorie had evidently as little intention of doing the one as she had power of doing the other.

"I happened to call at Churchill Rectory on the afternoon of the 12th of November," she said, after having quietly taken her oath, "and was there when my sister rode from the valley to obtain help for Mr. Jelfrey. She told us then—Mr. Jorden and his daughter, Colonel Stuart, Sir Neil Athelston, and myself—in substance—exactly what she has told in court to-day.

"I had known Mr. Eustace Jelfrey for two years before that date," Marjorie said, when questioned of all she knew about prisoner's connection with deceased, "and I disliked and mistrusted him through all that time. He had missed no opportunity of insulting, annoying, and threatening Mr. Spendir ever since Mr. Spendir first settled in Highshire; and, to my knowledge, Mr. Jelfrey practiced deceit upon us all; for never, until his disappearance, was it known among us that he was a married man when he came to The Anchorage. I do not believe Mr. Jelfrey is dead. He was, as he has often told us, an expert and able swimmer—he used to boast of it—and I know him well enough to be sure that, if by seeming dead he could injure Mr. Spendir, the seeming would come very easily to him."

This Marjorie said, speaking in sharp, clear sentences, and ignoring the two words she hated. She never looked at the audience, but at the bench, with a quiet, steadfast truthfulness in her clear eyes.

Neil gazed at her in astonishment; he had known intuitively, though she had never spoken to him confidentially on the subject, that her evidence would not go to corroborate Louisa's; but he had never guessed with what real earnestness she would plead for the prisoner, an earnestness more evident in her tone and her face than in the words she uttered.

Marjorie left her place without once venturing to glance at the solitary figure in that railed-off space among the crowd; so she had never seen how his worn face brightened, as he listened hungrily to her rich young voice.

"Lina Chester."

Slowly the girl made her way to the place Marjorie had vacated. In the crush, many moved instinctively to let her pass, pitying the restless pallor on the beautiful face, while others pressed forward to take a full look at it.

"My name is Magdalen Dymocke, and I am sister to the prisoner. You have related the reason of his dropping his real name, and, in doing so, have given it back to him; so I am glad to take mine, too."

Neil, sitting quite still in his place, felt as if the low, shy voice pierced him with pain in every word it uttered.

"We knew Eustace Jelfrey nearly six years ago. He had offered to initiate my brother into the ways of London, as my brother, who was several years younger, had lived through all his youth in a distant part of Cornwall. Into *what* he had power to initiate him, I only knew afterward. What sin he committed, and was clever enough to lay upon my brother, has been spoken of to-day. So skillfully it was done, that the trial resulted in Mr. Jelfrey's escape from suspicion, and in my brother's transportation for eight years. It has been told against him to-day, and again has made him appear guilty. Eustace Jelfrey escaped then. It was easy to him, for he had skill, and craft, and money; my brother had neither, and from that day his life was a ruined and a broken life."

A quick exclamation in the court, and a bottle of smelling-salts passed from hand to hand toward Lina.

"Thank you," she said, turning her eyes gratefully for a moment toward Lady Athelston and Marjorie, "but I am not faint."

Not faint! and the white, nervous fingers holding so tightly for support, and the beautiful, wide eyes so feverish. Neil's heart ached with a heavy pain, his strong, handsome face grew harassed and fretful.

"I am not faint." As she had spoken, her eyes turned again to the prisoner, and then the whole curious crowd saw the look which passed between the brother and sister—a look of deathless love and sympathy and trust—and once more that sound of pity, like a sob, stirred the multitude.

"On the 12th of last November I went to my brother's house in the morning, and arranged to call on him the same day at dusk. Mr. Eustace Jelfrey had had the power placed in his hands, of making known to Lady Athelston (without himself telling her) the secret of our lives, and he had proposed to me certain conditions which, if complied with, should prevent his availing himself of this power. So I went to consult my brother. He was working hard and indefatigably, trying to accumulate the sum for which that forged check had been drawn on Mr. Esdaile, and I was saving to help him. These efforts would be unavailing if we left Highshire, as I knew; and the—and the—those who had been kind and compassionate to us would have cause indeed to despise our memory always. Yet did I not know that now we could not help their despising us, whatever we did? If the truth were told, they would feel what cause they had to scorn us; if we went without its being told, they would know we had deceived them ungratefully."

The high-sheriff, sitting motionless, with folded arms, had his eyes half closed now in their sleepy fashion, so no one saw their dimness.

"When I went in the afternoon to consult my brother, I found that he had gone along the valley to meet the boys on their return from the Low Farm. I followed him, partly because I was really anxious for his answer to be given that evening, and partly because—"

"For what other reason?" The question came promptly from the bench.

"Partly," Lina said, in her truthful, brave simplicity, "because I knew Mr. Jelfrey was going on the same way for the same purpose, and I feared his meeting with my brother. So much of wrong he had done us, and so prosperous was he in his own sins, that I could not help dreading that they should meet at night, in the solitude of the hills, just when this new, craven demand of Mr. Jelfrey's was weighing and pressing on my brother's mind, and he knew that all his hopes of earning work and a home were shattered. I had not quite reached the pool above the valley, when I saw Miss Castillain and the two boys coming on horseback; and we had not quite met when I saw—"

At last the low, anxious voice broke down, while a great silence held the court. But it was only a few moments before she went on, still brave and truthful.

"When I saw my brother and Mr. Jelfrey fighting near the water—close to the water; so near that one of them could hardly help being thrown into the pool, if either were thrown down at all. I remembered, in a sudden terror, that my brother had never heard of the old shaft under the water, and so I hurried on, trying to reach him, and tell him what I knew would stay his hand there on the water's edge."

"Stay. You had good cause, then, to believe that Mr. Jelfrey would be the one to suffer?"

"I did fancy so. I hardly know exactly why," she answered, simply, "but I *did* fancy so. I remembered how many injuries my brother had received, and how the last and greatest had only just before been told him, and must be hurting him keenly then; and I think I fancied that his hand would be the stronger, because the *right* was on his side."

"*Expecting* what the end would be, you tried to reach the two men as they fought?"

"I tried, because I feared what the end might be; because I knew my brother had not heard of the exhausted mine. But I was too late."

"What did you see—exactly?"

"I saw Mr. Jelfrey's hand on my brother's collar, and one moment afterward my brother had thrown him from him, and he had fallen into the water. I can not say what my brother did then, or where Miss Castillain went, for I do not know. I suppose I fainted."

"And when you were conscious again?" The voice of the questioner was a little softened and compassionate.

"When I awoke I found the valley deserted. When it all came back to me, I knew Miss Castillain had gone to tell it, and my first impulse was to fly. I never saw my brother, even for a moment, after that, until I saw him—in jail."

"You have heard the prisoner say that he should think it no sin to kill deceased?"

"Ah! when will these cruel questions cease?" thought Marjorie, her fingers hurt in their tight

clasp, as she gazed at Lina's white and quivering lips.

"Yes; he said it to me. The witness who overheard it will tell of that. Mr. Jelfrey had blighted our lives forever; was it any wonder that my brother should hate him? But this hatred only caused him to avoid Mr. Jelfrey. He has never, to any one but myself, uttered a word to his disparagement. Was he not laboring always to earn what should repay a debt of Eustace Jelfrey's? His nature was, above all things, forbearing. Pre-eminently strong and brave to bear, it always has been; and I have never known him, all his life, willingly hurt even a dog."

Did the prisoner wish to question this witness?

"No, he had no question to ask," the prisoner said, without lifting his eyes.

Only once had he raised them to Lina during her examination. The agony of her face, in which the wonderful dark eyes seemed to burn with love and misery, was more than he dared trust himself to meet again. But while he almost unconsciously watched the effect of her words—almost unconsciously, because his eyes were tired—all feeling, acute and intensified, rushed back to him when he suddenly became aware of how intently Neil Athelston listened—he, the high-sheriff, sitting there in his honor and ease and dignity, watching the misery of the girl who had lived under his roof; and evidently foreseeing the fate of the prisoner, who had no name and no real place in the world, even if he were allowed to be harmless enough to stay in it. A hot light shone in Gerard's eyes at the thought—a passion which literally flamed beneath their heavy, weary lids.

So far there was nothing in the evidence sufficient to cast down Louisa Castillain's spirits; yet the suppressed sigh of pity in the court (suppressed until it was not more than a breath), did give her a creeping, indefinable fear of defeat.

"This slight movement in those people's favor will be of short duration," whispered Lady Helen Burton, encouragingly; "all the evidence goes to prove him guilty. The people now are in just the state to be decided entirely by the last witness; and we need not doubt what the verdict will be when we see who is the last witness. There she is; what a stony-looking creature!"

"Look at Sir Neil; just look how he is watching her. Isn't it absurd?" put in Louisa, sharply.

"Who?" inquired Lady Helen, leveling her lorgnette toward Colonel Stuart's group. "You mean Miss Chester, I suppose—at least Miss Something else, for I am sure I can not find out what her real name is, or if she has one. He must pity the poor little wretch to-day, I should think. It is the last time she will ever find herself under the same roof with Sir Neil Athelston."

"Dorcas Cheere."

The woman, lean and tall and upright, stood there in the witness-box just as she would have stood either in the dock or on the bench; just as she used to stand at her cottage-door, to hurl fierce and wrathful darts from her quick tongue at Fitz. No other attitude came quite naturally to Dorcas yet, and she would adopt no unnatural one for this occasion. Her face was lined and hard, and her lips tight and stern. Even Marjorie, in her keen scrutiny, could detect nothing in her manner beyond its old rigidity. As she took the oath, with cold, scrupulous, and even superstitious correctness, the girl's heart sunk with a sickening despair.

"My name is Dorcas Cheere, and I live in the cottage adjoining that one occupied, through the last summer, by the prisoner at the bar."

Lower and lower sunk Marjorie's heart. Lina's two hands went up to cover her aching eyes. Louisa Castillain leaned a little more forward in her seat, and listened eagerly with parted lips.

"I was very angry when Colonel Stuart obtained for him the cottage next to mine, and I told every one so. I did not know any thing about him, but I knew that I had had no choice in the matter, and I resented it. He had no one living with him but a little boy who called him father. They two muddled on as they could; at least I chose to think their life was a muddle, though I never went to see. I heard them making absurd noises sometimes—singing and laughing and playing, just as if they were two schoolboys out for a holiday—and this naturally aggravated me more. They were very poor, too, and I did not care (as I used to say, whenever I had an opportunity of saying it), for the cottage next mine to be let to a pauper. I knew he worked hard and earned money, yet he had no furniture to speak of, and no comforts in his house, and the mystery of *that* provoked me too. The boy never went to school, nor played with other boys, but was always with his father, as he called him, and he used to read to him for hours and hours at a time. One day Mr. Jelfrey came to my cottage on an excuse of sheltering, though I remember now that he went away in rain as heavy as he came in; and he began to talk of my neighbor, and to say quietly evil things of him; and then he found out from me—though I've been puzzling since to find out how he did it, for I'm no talker and babbler—that the wall in my parlor closet was uncommonly thin, and that I could often hear what the man and boy were saying in the next room. Over and over again he came, after that, pretending he wanted to read a valuable book I had of history—several months at two shillings a month, and unfinished—really, though, to listen to what was going on next door, and to put me up to listening, too. One night he came more quietly than usual, and made more fuss about being polite to me. Miss Chester had gone to the other cottage. I was vicious enough against them, I remember, for I didn't know they were any relation to each other; and he seemed rather to admire me for my anger. I remember he talked a good deal about his life not being safe; in fact, he hinted that no life was safe near Mr. Spendir. I took it all in, and between his speeches we listened to what they might be saying next door. Suddenly he heard what I fancied he must so long have been after. I heard it, too; it was just what I told afterward to Mrs. Esdaile and to the police. One gentleman has repeated the words to-day exact. I recognized their being exact, yet they sounded more revengeful, as he said them, than I thought for.

"That is all, gentlemen, except that I have a bit of a story of my own to tell, if his lordship allows me. I hope he will, for it is as necessary to this trial as repeating those words I overheard. Thank you," she said, as, after a slight discussion, she was told by the clerk to speak up.

"More than thirty years ago"—her voice was slow and calm only by a great effort, while her stern face flushed and paled like a girl's in her excitement—"more than thirty years ago my little girl (my only one) was stolen from me, and I never saw her face again, or heard a word of her welfare or her death. I never knew whether I might watch, as well as wait, for her home-coming, or whether I had any right to dream of a little girl in heaven. For thirty years this suspense made my life cold and hard and solitary, this and my own much-encouraged ill-temper. Now, I know her story, and a little of it I must repeat to-day. When she was grown up (and pretty, as I always knew she would be), this man, whom you call the deceased, saw her, admired her, and persuaded her to marry him. He took her from the good friends who had adopted her and loved her, and he never let them look upon her face again. He gave her a dull, mean home in some out-of-the-way part of London, going to her only occasionally, living a free, gay life himself while she was penned in this comfortless place, alone until after the birth of her son—this boy, gentlemen, who has been called the prisoner's child. At last he left her entirely. She worked for her own livelihood and her baby's, delicate, poor, and friendless. The boy was three or four years old when the prisoner—having heard her story from those friends who had been so good to her—sought her out, and helped and cheered her. He would have sent his sister to her, but that he knew it was no place for her to go alone with her uncommon beauty; so he went on being kind to my little girl, until he was accused of that crime which has been so much talked of to-day—the crime my little girl's cruel husband had committed. I don't know any thing about how it could have happened that he should have been transported for this, but he was, and he went away for eight years. In a little more than four, he came back, because leave had been given him for good conduct. One of his first acts when he reached London was to find out Eustace Jelfrey's neglected wife, to whom he had been good before. He found her in the same comfortless home, poorer, more friendless, more delicate, but not minding so much, because she was fast dying now."

An odd, quick catching of her breath here was all that Dorcas allowed the crowd to hear, or see, of her strongly curbed emotion.

"He—the man you make me call the prisoner—went to her again and again, and when she died, he paid (though Heaven knows he must have been poor enough, and I don't dare to think what hard work he did for that money) for a grave for her, and for careful hands to carry her to it—as people don't carry a pauper. And after that, he took the motherless, homeless, and worse than fatherless boy to a home which he made for him, and to a love and care which never after that failed him. From that day to the night I heard the greater part of this story—after seeing the prisoner taken in handcuffs from his own cottage, with my taunting words ringing in his ears—his home was the boy's home; all he had was shared with the child (shared equally, as two boys might have shared with each other), and in his great love and kindliness he never let the boy know he was not his own son, for fear he should feel the obligation, and fancy that all he did for him was not naturally done.

"Now, gentlemen, you understand that all this while the boy's father was living. Never one penny has he allowed for his son's maintenance; all has been paid out of the hard earnings of the prisoner, who, as we heard to-day, has been saving to pay a debt really owing by this very man. If I could but have that time back again, when I tried to make his life more miserable than it was; when I did all I could to madden him, and *should* have maddened him, only he was always too patient, and too forbearing to be maddened by me—then I should be content. This is what I know of the two men, my lord and gentlemen, and I suppose that when they met they fought. It would have been hard to help it, I should think, remembering all this; and Mr. Jelfrey, after all, is as likely to be alive as dead. It was plain to see he was cunning enough for any thing. But if they *did* fight, and the man who had the best heart and the strongest hand too had punished the coward at last, after years and years of injury, would that act be murder? Even if it would be called manslaughter, the law isn't so honest and just as we're always being told it is."

No voice had silenced, or even interrupted Dorcas. Even the utterly unprofessional part of her evidence fell amidst total silence. The effect of her words was keen and decisive. So earnestly, and with such heart-felt regret had she spoken (losing all thought of what the effect of her words on others was likely to be), that it startled even herself when, out of the silence, there rose the low, sad sound of women's sobs.

In a little haste, the counsel for the prosecution began his cross-examination. When this was over, Dorcas went back to her place beside her little grandson, and the eyes of the prisoner followed her with an untold gladness in them. His boy—his delicate, solitary child—would not be hardly treated now, he knew; would not lay down his head in the darkness, and wish that he might never be called to raise it again. Oh, this was good to know, after those bitter fears for the child, which he had fought with through three long months in prison!

The case was almost closed. The learned doctor, specially retained for the defense, addressed the jury, saying the case he had to submit to them was this:

There really was no evidence to support the charge of manslaughter. The character of the prisoner was unexceptionable, and that of the deceased (if he must call him deceased, when there was no actual proof of his death) very much the reverse. He would leave it with them to decide whether there was a case for a verdict of guilty. Much more than this the doctor said, but in the same strain; and then the judge briefly summed up the evidence, and the jury retired.

One silent, almost breathless, quarter of an hour in court—hope and fear holding their sway in hundreds of hearts, and hanging their ensigns on hundreds of faces—and then the door was opened, and the jurymen returned, one standing forward and looking at the judge. An utter silence, for the hearing of the verdict, in every corner of the court.

"Not guilty."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DISPERSED.

To a ringing cheer which throbbed to the roof of the crowded building, this much-talked-of trial ended, and Gerard Dymocke came out into the open air before the twilight of the March evening had gathered. It was months since he had breathed the wide, pure breath of heaven, unfettered and unconfined, and the sensation made him totter for a moment. Then he drew his hand hastily across his forehead, partly in weariness and bewilderment, partly in his great relief.

Colonel Stuart had given him the address of an inn where he was to join him, and Gerard knew that it would be near, and that it was chosen that he might avoid the crowd.

Would Magdalen come back to him now? Would she be well enough and strong enough now to go with him—traveling as poor people travel?

"The hotel is quite full this evening; there really is no private room vacant."

Gerard handed to the landlord the card which the colonel had given him. Then came the words,

"Oh yes. The gentleman meant the room reserved by Colonel Stuart. It was all right. It had been kept all day for him."

He would stay there a few minutes for Colonel Stuart, Gerard said, tiredly, as he went in. No thought but the thought that Lina might come could have induced him to wait at all.

The carriages were rolling as rapidly now from the front of the Assize Court as they had rolled thither in the excitement of the morning. But the feelings of most of the occupants were strangely changed.

"Louie, dear," said Lady Helen Burton, noticing the anger and disappointment which flushed Miss Castillain's cheeks, "you must come home with Reggie and me, and stay at Burton for a few days. We will take no refusal, will we, Reggie?"

Reginald, Viscount Lythwood, managed to assert, with his favorite smile and lisp, that it was impossible for *him* to take a refusal from Miss Castillain.

So Louisa, comforted a little, allowed him to hand her to a seat in the handsome coroneted carriage; after which he made himself as comfortable as he could, preparatory to making himself agreeable also.

Viscount Lythwood was languidly aware of the truth of the fact his father perpetually urged upon him, that it would be greatly to his advantage to marry one of the heiresses of old Castillain of Hawkedale. He knew as well as his father knew how seldom he would be likely to meet with a girl who possessed so strongly the three recommendations which were pointed out to him in the elder of these heiresses (the younger had been engaged when Lord Lythwood returned from making the grand tour)—great wealth (that was, of course, the first and weightiest charm), personal beauty, and (not the least weighty) a readiness to be won. All these charms had been pointed out to him, and he was sufficiently wise in his generation to feel the full value of them, and languidly to accept the good the gods provided.

The slight form of the little viscount leaned affectedly toward Louisa, and his lisping, slow words soon brought the smile back to her face, though they were by no means remarkable for genial or pointed wit.

So the earl's carriage rolled away, while the high-sheriff's splendid horses impatiently pawed the ground before the chief entrance to the court.

Marjorie, on her way through the vestibule with Lady Athelston, stopped a moment beside Colonel Stuart's party; a soft bright pink in her cheeks, and a happy light in her eyes, as she watched Neil's mother take the hand of her old companion, and ask where she was going.

"Home with me," said Mrs. Esdaile, trying to speak genially into the trumpet, though it was a great effort to her. "I can not spare her yet, nor can Jack. When she is a little stronger, I suppose we must let her brother take her from us again."

"Oh, Lina," whispered Marjorie, in her earnest, glad voice, "I'm so happy, and so grateful! If we were not in a crowd, I should kiss you while I say it. Are you going to him now?"

"Colonel Stuart thinks," said Lina, a great glad light shining in her beautiful eyes, "that he can bring him to The Anchorage, and he is going to try. He is going to him now; he thinks Gerard is more likely to come if I do not go yet—that he will come to fetch me."

"Only," smiled Marjorie, "they will not let you go, of course, while you are so weak."

"Oh, I am strong now," the girl answered, with quick pleasure. "This has made me strong all at once."

"You think so now, dear."

"No, I shall not let her go out of my care, even into her brother's quite yet," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly. "But, all the same, we want to see him at The Anchorage; and as Alick thinks he is more likely to come with him alone, we are going to the hotel to await them."

"If Colonel Stuart thinks that is wisest, it is sure to be so," said Marjorie, gently. "Lina, I shall come to see you and Adelaide to-morrow, and I fancy Lady Athelston will insist on coming too. Now I must snatch a minute to speak to Dorcas; I must, even if Lady Athelston sends all the javelin-men to stop me. Mrs. Cheere has decided to take a fly all the way home, and Colonel Stuart has taken Jet, and gone to order it. Just as if it were to be a peculiar vehicle which only he and Jet could choose."

"I think I know why he has taken Jet to that hotel," said Lina, with a slow, glad smile of comprehension.

Then, after Marjorie's assenting nod, she followed Mrs. Esdaile through the portico, little Jack keeping beside her protectingly. Out upon the steps to them came Neil, his bright head bare, his long blue eyes sparkling with something deeper than excitement.

"Miss Chester, tell me how glad you are; tell me that the first trial of my high-shrievalty has been a happy one for you."

"Happy!" echoed Lina, the old shadow falling over her face.

"Has *ended* happily, at any rate," he corrected, with an anxious gaze.

"It has ended as I never dared to hope that it would end," she answered. "Thank you for being glad for us, Sir Neil."

He felt then just a shade discomfited; it was

not for "us" he had been glad. He had only rejoiced exceedingly to see Lina's face without that look of misery which it had worn all day. He lingered beside Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, longing to say more, yet entirely at a loss what to say, as he had rarely been in his life before.

"Here I am, Neil," put in Marjorie, to the rescue. "Now, put me into the brougham to your mother. I know she's tired of waiting; and the peculiarity of women is, that they require to be put by gentlemen into carriages, as if they were rugs. Neil, I'm helpless, almost, in my great surprise," she added, turning with him, after her bright little nod into Mrs. Esdaile's carriage, "at the rapid growth of the twin canaries' calves. Why, they must have been in a hot-bed since I saw them last, when they were of quite ordinary dimensions."

"I should not like to see them pricked," laughed Neil.

"I should; it would be such a pleasant reminder of my doll days. I've been as weak as usual, Neil; I've promised to go home with your mother for to-night."

"That's kind, dear," he answered, folding a shawl about his mother, and receiving placidly the proud, pleased smile with which she rewarded him.

And so, one after another, the carriages drove away, and the crowd dissolved in a manner usual with crowds, and as inexplicable as the great problem which has to do with the disappearance of pins.

There was hardly a sound of the day's excitement heard in the room where Gerard waited; for the tan upon the street deadened all sound of passing wheels, and the bustling, hungry demands had hardly yet begun to disturb the quiet of the hotel.

The twilight of the March evening was creeping slowly down upon the busy town, when the handle of the door was turned with an unsteady awkwardness, and Gerard, watching and waiting, saw the door open to admit Jet's small figure, and pale, eager face.

"Dad! oh, dad!"

Such a cry it was! so full of love, and longing, and overwrought excitement; yet subdued, as were all the child's words and actions now. There was an utter silence in the room. The boy's care-worn, anxious little face was hidden on the man's broad breast, and the strong arms, freed at last, were tight and close about him.

"Dad"—the young voice was the first to break the silence—"will you come with grandmother and me?"

"Not to-night, laddie." Ah! what joy it was to the shy, tender-hearted child to hear the old pet name once more! "But I will come back to you."

"When, father?"

"Not *father*, dear," the young man said. "Don't you remember that story, which we learned off by heart one night?"

"I *must* say 'father,'" whispered the boy, wistfully; "Mrs.—I mean granny, says I may. Father, she's so good to me!"

"I know it, laddie; I saw it to-day." And Gerard's beautiful, warm eyes were looking straight into the child's, with a laughing light in their depths, just as they used to look so often in the old busy, happy, struggling times. "And doesn't it make you proud to have an English history to read at last? But, listen—you mustn't be deluded enough to fancy that you will find the stories there exactly as I used to tell them. Real historians are apt to forget the parts I used to remember."

Jet's soft, long-forgotten laugh was good to hear.

"You made lots of them up, dad, I can guess now, by your eyes; but—but I can never read the big history that—that—Mr. Jelfrey used to read, because—because that very first night, dad, when I was sitting so miserable by the fire, she—granny, I mean—burned it; burned it all, every number, one after another. I know why now; but I was frightened then."

"Now, go, dear lad, to granny."

The young man's voice was gentle with an untold gentleness, and the child's face—so wistful and sorrowful now that that night had been recalled—was pressed once more in silence to his own.

A few minutes after that, Jet was driving along the dusky highway to Churchill, his tired head at rest upon his grandmother's arm, as she sat upright in her corner of the fly, unbent and seemingly unbendable, but with a strange new weakness glittering in her eyes.

And the colonel and Gerard sat together in the inn.

"Think better of this decision, Spendir (the old name slips out, you see); come with us to-night, and we will let you leave again whenever you choose, even to-morrow, if you wish it. Come and spend this evening with your sister."

"I can not," the young man answered, with grave decision. "The wish is kind, as all your wishes are, Colonel Stuart; but I can not—nor can I even explain why."

"Never mind that," put in the colonel; "I understand without explanation. But I trust you will reconsider your decision; we shall all be so glad to take you home with us."

"Not yet," said Gerard, with a sadness which he strongly fought against. "I have a stain upon my name, and—and the burden is one I can only bear alone. A stain upon my name, I said! What name have I? Who can imagine, after that scene in court to-day, that I have any name to call my own—or my sister's? Colonel Stuart, can I use my freedom until I have won us the name we inherit? That is my first work."

"But this is absurd, Spendir," exclaimed the colonel, somewhat hotly. "You are fit now only to rest and sleep; and— Have you eaten any thing to-day?"

"I forget," Gerard answered, absently; "I am not hungry, so I suppose I have."

A hurt and rather puzzled look was on the officer's face as he rang, and ordered dinner.

"Spendir," he said then, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "promise to take your dinner heartily as a man should after a long day's fast. If you will not come with me, I will bring your sister to say good-bye; but I will not go until you give me this promise. You will make her most unhappy, too, if you refuse me in this."

"I will try, indeed. Colonel Stuart," he added, with a sudden brightness in his tired eyes, "is Lina really going with you—really going back with Mrs. Esdaile—to your happy, easeful home?"

"She is really coming with us, I am very glad to say," returned the colonel, his face saddening pitifully. "She is not well enough yet for any thing but to rest and recruit. The question now is whether she will not feel all the pleasure taken away from her by your refusal to come too. Have you thought of this?"

"Colonel Stuart," the young man said, "I can not think how I can ask more from you when you do so much; but will you really bring her here before I go, just for five minutes—only five minutes?"

This quiet, sad request was just what the colonel knew would be the indisputable sign that his own proposal was unavailing.

"If you refuse really to join her," he said, "she will, I know, want to accompany you at once. Of course, you will not allow that. It would be ruin to her health to travel now."

"To travel as she must travel with me? Yes, it would be bad for her," the artist said. "I am only too grateful, Colonel Stuart, to leave her in the home you offer her until she is better. I could not take her; but it will be easier to begin my travels and work, if I hear her say good-bye, and pray God speed me."

"Spendir," put in the officer, with sudden earnestness, "let this uncertain search go by. You will wear blamelessly any name you choose. Why search for one which—"

"But the name I seek," Gerard interrupted, with the old dauntless spirit in his dark, worn face, "is my mother's, and I seek it for her. If I can put it on her nameless grave, and see Lina bear it proudly and purely—as she would bear any name—I think I shall have no wish beyond."

"You will have many wishes beyond," laughed Colonel Stuart, hurriedly. "Wishes are natural and healthy for a brave fellow like yourself."

"Perhaps so," was the answer. "Isn't it Claudio who says that the only medicine the miserable have is hope? It must be true. I am miserable enough, yet I have hope. I can not say for what, or where I found it; but it is certainly here—even yet."

"Of course," the colonel answered, pleasantly. "It will always keep you company, go where you will."

"Even with a brand upon me—a nameless convict," added Gerard, with a smile. "Will you tell the master of High Athelston what I am going to do, Colonel Stuart, and that I shall come back when I have found what I seek—not before?"

"I do not trust to that; you are too sensible to stick to that determination, Spendir. Take the journey, but let us see you again soon. In the hall below you will find your portmanteau packed. I did it myself; no one else has been to the cottage. I packed it with every thing I thought you would need, and that had not been sent you before; and in it is your money, and the key of the cottage. No one is to enter it until you yourself return there. You will be sure of that, because you have the key with you. No one ever *has* entered it yet, except myself that once. There it is as you left it; and so it will be, until you yourself unlock the door. Spendir, you will come back, if only to see your boy again? And we shall take great care of your sister, all of us. You may judge what care Miss Marjorie Castillain will take of her after those messages of hers to you; and you know by this time whether my sister and I will not do so."

But Gerard had covered his face now, and hidden it.

"I will fetch her," concluded the colonel, his voice a little broken as he moved away. "Remember you have promised to dine—and I never knew you break your word."

One short half-hour, sad and yet happy too, the brother and sister spent together in that quiet room; no one breaking in upon their farewell, no one witnessing their brave, hopeful sympathy. Then Lina joined Mrs. Esdaile and Colonel Stuart again, and drove away with them to the pleasant home which had been opened so kindly to her when she had no home in the world to call her own.

And in the silent room she had left, Gerard bravely tried to keep his promise to his one kind friend, but failed sorely. The dinner—not quite untasted—was taken down presently, to his great relief; and then he sat beside the window and rested in the dark. A poor, unessful rest it was for the man whose brain and heart were burning.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NIGHT-FALL AMONG THE GRAVES.

A BEAUTIFUL May morning; its sunshine falling full upon two travelers who lounged against the gate of a roadside station in the South of Devonshire. As they waited for their train, they fell into conversation, chattering of where they had been, and whither they were going, as travelers naturally do, even if their acquaintanceship be only a few minutes old, as was the acquaintanceship of these two.

One was very young in appearance, scarcely more than a boy, and carried a fishing-basket slung across his shoulder. The other was a young man, too, wanting two years yet of thirty; but he had the look upon his face of one who had lived through the cares and disappointments of a life. Such a handsome face it was, though; bearded and sunburned, with strength in every feature, yet with the gentleness and refinement which, added to strength, form the most essential manliness; with brave, fearless eyes, in which there lay always, deep down, a steadfast quietude, which seemed to set this man apart from others of his age.

Gerard—for it was he—was listening while his companion idly told of a village which he had gone out of his way to visit, and the young fisherman graciously accepted the eager attention, as a tribute to his powers of description. Naturally; for how could he know that this apparently well-seasoned traveler gave always the same rapt attention to any one who would tell him of a village which he had not yet visited?

"If you had not been coming on to Penzance," the young tourist said, glancing with unconscious admiration into the listening face above him, "I believe you would really have been tempted to find out this dull and samey little place, which I should never have gone near, but for knowing that the rector (having been my tutor once) would never forgive me if I passed within access of his place, and did not turn aside to see him.

But if you *do* find the temptation irresistible, I will direct you across the country."

This was said in laughing irony, and the speaker opened his eyes wide indeed when Gerard gravely accepted the offer, and turned to leave the station, simply waiting for the proffered directions. They were given in much amusement and surprise; and when Gerard had shown that he understood them, the travelers parted with a jest.

"Good-morning. If you mean to go out of your way to visit on foot every village and hamlet that you hear of, winter will comfortably have set in before you see St. Michael's Mount."

"No matter," answered Gerard, pleasantly. "I would rather visit a village I've never seen before than St. Michael's Mount, which I've seen a hundred times; and I'm strong enough to walk any distance. Good-morning, and thank you."

And so, half laughing, he started on his way; the old hope, which had lived through the sad experience of many years, making his step light, though day after day he had been wearying himself to meet only defeat and disappointment.

The sun was pouring its hot beams upon the white highway, when at last the gray tower of a village church shone out among the trees, silvery in the sunshine. Gerard's heart throbbed as he neared it; but, then, so many times before had his heart throbbed with hope, when he felt that there was just the possibility of his engrossing, long-nursed wish meeting its fulfillment!

On the outskirts of the village, he passed a handsome red house in a lawn. That was the rectory, of course. Then came the cottages, scattered here and there on the roadside; then a high square house, with pillars at the door, and a brilliant sign-board above.

Pleasantly returning the salutation of the comely landlord of this comely village inn, Gerard walked on toward the church. It lay a hundred yards farther on, separated from the road by a high railing, the gate in which stood now wide open. Gerard, with his foot upon the step, and his hand upon the gate, stood a moment, breathing quickly. Before him was an old wooden porch, with a leaning cross upon it; below that, a solitary gravestone lay in the footway; and these things—so strange to him, yet so familiar—made his pulses throb, and dimmed his eyes, as no tears could dim them.

An old man, working in the church-yard, saw him stand so for long minutes, and waited curiously for an opportunity to open a conversation, as old sextons have delighted in doing, ever since (if not before) the days of Hamlet.

"A fine old church, sir. Do'ee wish to see it?"

He had taken heart of grace, and approached Gerard, rather taken aback, though, by the bewildered gaze which met his.

Gerard shook his head, passing on toward the grave outside the porch, and bending to read the words upon it:

"MAGDALEN.

"This simple stone shall bear a simple line:
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine."

Not a word did Gerard utter, even in a whisper to himself; no thought even shaped itself to him; but he knew that a great and overpowering gratitude filled his heart to overflowing.

He leaned against the church-porch, weak and trembling. It was not because the old man's eyes were upon him that he did not hide his face there, sobbing like a child. It was only that the truth had not yet entered his heart, was only surging wildly in his pulses, giving him a joy and hope that were confused like madness.

"Would 'ee like the key of the church, sir?"

Slowly the words made themselves clear to Gerard.

"Yes," he answered, unsteadily. "Will you go and—"

But here his voice faltered again, for as he looked up he caught sight of the old sun-dial with its moss-grown pedestal.

"I'll fetch 'ee the key, sir."

"But," said Gerard, looking into the old man's inquisitive face, while his eyes for the first time lost their far-away engrossed expression; "but I want more than that. I want to see the register. Can I?"

"Why not, sir? Parson 'll have to come himself, that's all. I'll go and fetch un."

So he went, while Gerard sat in the porch alone, trying to make the wonderful familiarity of this place distinct to his bewildered, grateful thoughts, and trying, too—poor Gerard!—to prepare himself for another disappointment, perhaps to be the last, as it would be the greatest, of all.

More than an hour had passed for him so, when the old man returned with the clergyman of the village. Before he and Gerard had reached the vestry together—after talking a few minutes in the porch—the clergyman had, as he fancied, read a whole story in the young man's dark, thoughtful face, and handsome, shabbily attired figure; and he not only acknowledged him a gentleman, but even one whose knowledge had, by some means, sounded unusual depths.

"The marriage register of twenty-nine years ago," he repeated, taking the musty old books from a safe which he had unlocked. "That would be the year— Ah! here it is! Before my time, a good bit. What is it, Dare? I will come out into the nizle to you. Will you excuse me?" he added, turning to Gerard, who tried to smile his thanks for the thoughtful act.

May—June—July. Yes, that was the month his mother left the old farm near the coast. There was only one marriage registered through the whole month. Ah!

Down upon him, as he sat alone in the dusty vestry, had come a flood of radiant, dazzling light. Ah! what a pitiful heaven had sent it round him in his doubt and fear and shame! Here was the marriage register of Sir Gerard Athelston, Baronet, of High Athelston, in the County of Highshire, with Magdalen, only daughter of Hiram Dymocke, of Tresean Farm, in the County of Cornwall; and the signatures were there, and the date, and—and— Down on his knees upon the stones, fell Gerard; his head bowed upon the paper, and all his heart poured out in gratitude to his God for this.

"I am very glad to have been of service to you," said the rector, when Gerard and he stood in the church-porch together again; "and I shall recollect exactly what it is, when I am called upon to show the register to others."

Gerard thanked him with a clasp of the hand which was strong and firm and gentle, like him-

self; and the old sexton, too, had his hand-shake before the crown was slipped into his palm; then both the clergyman and grave-digger stood watching the young man, with rather a novel kind of interest.

From the gate, Gerard gave another glance (such a lingering one!) back at the church-porch and the low grave; then he walked away rapidly toward the station, his eyes dim with gladness, his lips whispering again and again his mother's name, and Lina's, and his own, which had been his father's.

"Magdalen Athelston—Magdalen, Lady Athelston; Gerard Athelston—Sir Gerard Athelston."

Gerard never entertained the possibility of there being no other train which would take him to Penzance that day; he only felt now that he must hasten on to Tresean, and tell his grandfather the good, happy news—how he had found at last what he had sought so long. He had no thought to-day to give to the injustice which had caused the old home to be closed against him and Lina, as it had years before been closed against their mother. He had no thought to give to his grandfather's hardness and cruelty; he only felt that, first of all, he must go and gladden him by telling him how true were his daughter's dying words. He must make bright again every remembrance of her. He must bring back to the old man's heart the love that had once been so tender. How happy it would make him!

There *was* another train for Penzance that evening, and Gerard took his seat in it, his heart still beating quickly in his great excitement. Tresean lay eight or nine miles from Penzance, and there was no regular conveyance going at that hour; but nothing could delay or discourage Gerard now. He set out to walk along the coast, every step of which was familiar to him, as quickly as if most of the previous hours of that day had been spent in resting instead of walking; and hardly had his step once slackened, when the old farm itself, the chill, unloving home of his youth and boyhood, came in sight.

Quickly and more quickly his pulses beat. The weariness (though it might cruelly tell upon him by-and-by) was not even thought of now. But there was one spot he must see before he went back to his mother's early home—her nameless and unhonored grave.

Leaving the farm upon his left, he turned up a stony little lane, from which he could see, far beyond him, the church tower, rising dim and solitary against the dusk of the evening sky. Down below him, in the little wood he skirted, the smoke curled up from a solitary cottage.

That was the keeper's cottage where his mother died. He should like to go there—he *must* go there—before he left Cornwall again; to claim his name and his inheritance; after he had seen his grandfather and made him happy. What would he say? What would the old man think? Would he show his happiness? Would it overpower him? Sudden joy was as hard to bear as—harder than any thing, Gerard thought to-night.

How well Gerard remembered the narrow, steep road! How many, and many, and many a time he and Lina had walked this way to church, and thought it so long! Two miles, it was considered. Why, it did not seem a mile to-night; for was not there the church just before him now?

Gerard knew where to find the curious old Cornish stile into the church-yard, though the gate might be locked; but should he be able, before the deepening twilight grew and gathered into night, to find that grave on which there had never been a stone? He had only seen it once. It was not until the night before he left Cornwall with Lina, that his grandfather's sister had told him his mother's story; and only in the morning before they started had he been shown the grave which was his mother's, lying under the rough stone wall which bounded the church-yard. But if the light would only last long enough, he had no fear of not recognizing it.

Slowly Gerard went up the narrow, stony path toward where he knew it lay, his head bent in the softened, dying light. There were no heavy trees to intersect the sky; the letters on most of the stones could still be read without trouble. How familiar it all seemed to him! Here was the great square stone, the words on which he and Lina, as little children, had so often puzzled over in vain:

"Sacred to the Memory of Christian Polivy, and his wife Grace. The former substituted a temporal for an eternal existence on the fiftieth anniversary of his birth; the latter relinquished this transitory state, in the agreeable prospect of a superior one, on the identical day in the succeeding year."

Gerard moved on, musing why such words should be chosen just to mark the simple passage of death.

"The simple passage of death."

He repeated the words, wondering why they had risen so readily to his lips.

Here was another well-remembered head-stone, which Lina and he used to notice and wonder over:

"Husband, farewell!—my life is past!
I loved you well while life did last.
Lord grant you joy where'er you are:
Yourself prepare to follow me."

Why had the words been left, when the poor husband to whom the farewell (and the warning) had been addressed had himself been laid there only five days afterward, as the words below proved? And why, mused Gerard, absently, did the stone-mason sacrifice the old lady's rhyme to his own peculiar notions of grammar?

Ah! that was a new stone! Its whiteness made the large black letters stand out clear and striking. Gerard's eyes (searching earnestly and untiringly) fell upon them, and rested there:

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Over and over again the words seemed to come before him, even after he had passed the new, white head-stone.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

A little farther on lay the grave he sought, just under the wall there—only a few steps farther on. Was that it? Slowly Gerard approached and bent above it. Yes, this was it—this narrow, grass-covered hillock under the wall. Gently, as if the stillness of the time and place had wrapped themselves about him, he knelt, and laid his two hands softly on the grave.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death."

Not written there, these words—only uttered. He had found it at last; this grave with no name upon it, this grave which had lain unnoticed here for nearly thirty years; and *he* had the right to bring the sunshine full upon it, and make his mother's name an honored one.

Was it the great mental excitement, or the bodily fatigue, which was telling upon him now? Making no effort against this new weariness, he lay down upon the ground, and laid his face upon the turf, whispering one word as he had never whispered it in all his life before,

"Mother!"

Lying in the stillness there, Gerard felt a strange, new happiness creep into his heart; a happiness such as he had never even dreamed of; though, in all his suffering and degradation, he *had* dreamed of happiness—poor Gerard!

The darkness of the spring night came softly down upon the hallowed ground, and still Gerard Athelston lay there with his face upon his mother's grave, dimly conscious that a great blessing had been given both to him and to those he loved, but no longer quite conscious what that blessing was. All the passion which had troubled his restless heart for years was quieted now. All the scorn and rebellion which had ever risen to his lips were softened now. His eyes, so calm and trustful, and so full of rest and quietness, could never darken again to anger or contempt.

The stars came peeping, one by one, from the far-off heaven; and shone, calm and tender, down upon the quiet dead. One fell, swift and bright, across the wide, dim gray; and Gerard watched it dreamily, wondering if it could be that angels fell from heaven now, as they had fallen long ago. And the darkness deepened, and the night came down upon the silence—softly and tenderly, however treacherously, there among the homes of the dead.

CHAPTER XL.

AT HOME AGAIN.

In the May sunshine, pouring warmly through the large bow-window of the library at The Anchorage, Lina Chester sat, with her eyes fixed upon the winding drive which led from the lawn gate to the front entrance of the house. Opposite to her, Marjorie Castillain knelt on the soft white mat, and, leaning from the open window, played with the dainty roses which looked so brightly up to greet the sun-rays.

All through the spring months, a certain quietness, new to Marjorie, had gradually grown to belong to her, and even those who knew her best, and loved her best, could scarcely comprehend it. Could it be, they said, because the friend whom she had taken to her heart seemed drooping as the summer came? Or could it be because the time was near now for her marriage with Sir Neil Athelston, according to the old agreement? Or could it be because her sister was even colder and more harsh to her now than she had ever been before?

What could it be? Often and often Lina wondered, as she was wondering now, sitting and watching Marjorie in the sunshine. Often and often Neil wondered, recalling the bright laughter and heedless raillery which for all her life had belonged to her. Often and often Mrs. Esdaile wondered, looking in vain for an answer either from Neil or from Marjorie herself. Often and often Colonel Stuart wondered, loitering alone about his pleasant garden, in the dusk of these calm spring evenings, and letting the thoughts crowd thick and fast upon him then, which he had put aside all day, and which (unshared) must slowly do their part in making the grave and thoughtful soldier older than his years.

But the question was answered to none. Did even Marjorie herself know exactly what it was which made her step slow, and her eyes so often far away and sad—the radiant, laughing eyes? Sometimes, watching anxiously and vainly for the return of strength in Lina's frail form, she fancied that she understood it. Sometimes, watching Neil hurrying up that sunny gravel path, she fancied again that she understood it. But never, except when she was quite alone, and recalling grave, kind, helpful words which she always seemed to disregard, did she approach the truth.

"Lina, do you notice how naturally it comes to one to watch the entrance gate from this open window?" said Marjorie, turning to look into her companion's face, with a startled look, as if conscious of having been watching for rather a noticeably long time.

"It comes sadly natural to me now," said Lina, her own eyes coming slowly home from their distant gaze. "Are you very tired of seeing me do it, Miss Marjorie?"

"I spoke because I fancied you would notice *me*," answered Marjorie, leaning her head against the window and looking at Lina with a smile. "I can not think why I do it either, for Neil's receding figure has been invisible for half an hour at least. Don't you think Neil looked dreadfully harassed to-day, Lina?"

"I hardly saw him for one minute," replied Lina, with a sudden weariness in her tone.

"No; and that proves for Neil that there is one thing he tries to do which is not for his own pleasure. He will not force his presence where he knows it is not welcomed. In that he is strangely altered. In one or two other respects he is altered, too," added Marjorie, her eyes filled with bright tenderness as they met Lina's. "You would hardly notice the change, dear, as I should—I who have known him so long—but one year has changed him more than could ten such years as those he spent before last spring; and the change is plainly written in his face. He looks ten years older than he looked that day, among the fallen leaves, when he asked me so complacently to be his wife. He looks a man of six-and-thirty now, yet he is only six-and-twenty."

"No; only six-and-twenty—just six-and-twenty," said Lina, absently, thinking of her own age and Gerard's, and of how soon after her father's death his widow had married Neil's father.

"One thing that tells upon him is the constant worrying of his mother," resumed Marjorie, curiously watching Lina's face. "Continual dropping will wear away a stone, they tell us; and the continual dropping of Lady Athelston's fretfulness will, of course, wear away Neil's comfort and good looks. Nothing pleases her now; nothing seems to her fancy to go rightly at

High Athelston; nothing will please her again until *you* go back to her. I never saw a rudderless vessel," concluded Marjorie, with the old, swift brightness of laughter in her eyes, "but I should fancy Lady Athelston looks as like one as —as she feels."

"But is not Sir Neil her rudder now, as he has always been?" inquired Lina, seeing that Miss Castillain waited for her reply.

"No, she feels that he has failed her. She began to think it when he took upon himself to make her dismiss Fletcher, for the tales she had been in the habit of composing about you. She went on thinking it when he got this new sort of quiet, determined way about him; and she finished thinking it when she found he had some purpose of his own, and kept to it. One thing upholds her, though; that is, the cessation of hostilities between Neil and myself. 'Marjorie, my dear,' she says to me, plaintively, 'you have learned at last, as I always prognosticated you would, how much more indulgent Neil is when you let him have entirely his own way. I knew you would learn this before your marriage; and now I feel sure you will be the happiest wife in Highshire!' Poor old lady! I could heartily laugh, if it were not that she is as much in earnest over this idea as she can be over any thing. Her management of her only son has not been all-successful, has it? Poor Neil! poor Neil!"

Again Marjorie's eyes turned to the scene beyond the open window, and lingered far off again, with that gentleness which was utterly sad in the girl whose every glance had used to be armed with fun and raillery.

"Ah, Lina, look! There is a curious sight. Mrs. Cheere coming through the gate; coming up to the house, I declare. I should like to run and meet her; I should if—this were my own house."

A sudden movement Marjorie made. Clasping one of the rose-sprays in her two hands, she bent her face within them, too, inhaling the scent thirstily; but Lina saw the soft tint of the rose itself mount rapidly from cheek to brow. Unconsciously, in her thoughts, Lina repeated those last few words, seeking a cause for this; but before she was aware of their meaning, she, too, had caught sight of Dorcas walking rather hastily up the lawn. Then, with a sudden flash of hope, which was literally akin to pain, she half rose in her seat.

"Oh! do you think," she faltered, "Miss Marjorie, is it possible she has news for *me?*"

"My dear," said Marjorie, forgetting every other thought in her sympathy for the girl who had waited so patiently through these spring months for her brother's return, "she would hardly be the one to meet the news before ourselves; she is always welcome here, so it is no wonder that she comes. But we shall soon hear."

Then Marjorie, rising from the floor, took up her work, and, as she sewed, she chatted pleasantly to draw Lina's thoughts from those possible —only just possible—tidings of Mrs. Cheere's.

Hardly ten minutes had been spent so, when Marjorie caught sight of Dorcas walking back again toward the gate, with Colonel Stuart at her side. She made no allusion to this, but on his return he came straight into the room to the girls. Searchingly Marjorie's eyes met him as he entered, and the question that they asked so mutely, he answered with a quiet smile.

"Miss Chester," he said, gently, as he stood beside her, "I have ordered the pony to be harnessed in Adelaide's little carriage; for I want you to have a drive. Such a day as this should not be wasted indoors. Miss Marjorie, you walked from Hawkedale, so I want you to have the drive too. If I say so, shall you immediately refuse, *because* I say so?"

"May I drive, Lina?" she asked, her eyes gentle and wistful as she read his gaze, and the cool contradiction far enough from her lips now.

"Thank you, Colonel Stuart," said Lina, her weak hands locked before her as she rose. "Has Gerard come?"

"Yes, he has come," the officer answered, hardly wondering at the question, because he knew how ever-present with her was the hope of Gerard's return, "and he is at the old home. He went straight to the cottage in Nether Lane, as I fancied he would, and Mrs. Cheere has just been to tell us."

"He—he did not come himself?" faltered Lina.

"He would be tired, and hardly care to have the trouble of greeting us all yet, however anxious we might be to see him. Besides, he would naturally wish to meet you first alone."

"Thank you; then—may I go?"

Colonel Stuart opened the door without answering. Something, either in the news he had just heard, or in the girl's face, made him fear his own voice.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, when Lina had passed out of hearing, "you are her best companion now. She will not care for me to take her. Will you? I will tell Adelaide as soon as she returns."

"I will drive her to the cottage," Marjorie answered, softly, "and then come back. If you and Adelaide let me, I can fetch her again later on. Colonel Stuart, I am afraid he is ill."

"I am afraid so, too," he answered. "He looks so, Dorcas says; but he is travel-tired, I dare say. When his sister has been with him, I may go."

Very silently the two girls drove through the town, and then along the lane to the two white cottages. Once they spoke of the primroses on the hedge-bank; once of the bells, which were ringing merrily as they passed through the town; and once or twice of the pony, who capered briskly along the sunny lane; but never once of the thoughts nearest their hearts; and each time quietly, as if in the hush of a shadow they could not even understand.

"Good-bye, Lina dear," said Marjorie, softly, as the pony stood before the wicket gate, which Mrs. Esdaile's trim little groom held open; "I will come back for you in two or three hours' time."

Then she turned and drove away, without waiting for any reply; and Lina hastened up the garden-path, trembling unaccountably as she neared the cottage. Bright and warm as the sun shone without, there was a fire burning in the grate, which had been brushed and polished by hands that had more experience than those which used to try to keep it bright in the old time. Drawn close beside it, was a stiff little horse-hair couch, which Marjorie would have recognized as Mrs. Cheere's, but which Lina had never seen before.

Gerard was not lying on it now. At the sound of her step he had risen with a strength of ex-

citement, which, for the moment that it lasted, was like the strength of old times—just for the moment that it lasted. And while he held her in his close and tender clasp, he whispered that he had found what he sought; found it all just as their mother remembered.

"Each day, each hour of all those two months," he said, "I felt that I might find it, and knew that when I did I should come home to tell you. How could I write to tell you, dear? And could I write to say I had *not* found it, when, before the letter reached you, I might have done so? You see now, Lina, why you have waited. Dear, was not hope with you all the time, as it was with me?"

Lina, her eyes wide and bright, and her breath coming quickly, stood to listen to his words, both her hands held fast in his.

"Gerard," she faltered, trembling feebly in her untold joy, "it is worth waiting for. Our own mother's name can live pure and bright in our own hearts forever; but—but you are tired and ill."

"A little, dear," he answered, gently; "but I have not told you half I have to tell. Lina, oh, Lina, you should have seen the old man's joy when I told him of our mother's marriage; his joy, and his remorse, and his regret, and something else—something like *love*, even for you and me. He would never have consented to my leaving him again yet, but that I have come to fetch you; and to let that selfish interloper know that what I told him I was going to find I have found; and to—"

"To see the old place again, Gerard," she put in, her quiet voice soothing and calming the excitability which she knew must hurt him, while he looked so weak and ill; the excitability which had always belonged to his nature, in spite of all its patient, brave forbearance.

She laid his head back upon the cushion of the hard little couch, and kissed his feverish lips again and again; starting a few minutes afterward to note how strangely, suddenly chill they had grown.

"The room seems colder than it used to be," he said, his lips quivering on his teeth as he looked round. "Is it because it has been so long uninhabited?"

"I will soon have the cottage warm and bright and sunny, Gerard, dear," said his sister, her voice a little broken as she noticed how richly the May sunshine shone into the room. "For us two, living together again as we have lived so long, this will be quite a pleasant home, until we are both strong enough to travel."

"Let me look at you, my dear. Have the worry and the trouble I have caused you left their marks upon you still?"

"I never had fatigue or anxiety to bear without stupidly showing how weakly I bore it—had I, Gerard?" she asked, only anxious now that he should feel a dread of *her* traveling, because she dreaded it so much for him.

And while she softly moved about the room, giving it, with the sweetness and brightness of her presence, a look of home which it had never had before, he followed every movement with a deep sadness in his beautiful eyes, wondering if the worries and the troubles he had meant (of which she had so large a share, and which she had borne so much more bravely than she guessed of) were over now, at least for her.

"I shall go upstairs presently, Gerard, to make your bedroom pleasant; but Mrs. Cheere has put a fire, so I need not go quite yet," she said, coming, as she spoke, to sit beside him, where she could gaze into his face, without his reading all the yearning and the fear in hers.

"How long will they let you stay with me today?"

"How long, Gerard!" she echoed, with a smile. "For always, now. Do you think I could go anywhere without you now?"

"Lina, will you go back to the old farm, just to see grandfather once again, my pet?"

"Wherever—whenever you take me," she whispered softly, in her new, keen anguish of fear.

"You will find him greatly changed," he went on quietly, leaving her words unnoticed except by the mute gesture of taking in his the small, thin hand, which she had laid caressingly upon his shoulder, "and I know you will never remember any thing beyond his disappointment, and the long punishment of his suspicion; nothing else—nothing against him, dear. And—and he wishes to see you."

"I will go with you; I shall be glad to go *then*," Lina answered, emphasizing the last word.

"Not yet, perhaps; but you will go when you can; it will cheer and comfort the old man, and it will do you good too, dear. I am very glad I saw him; I am very glad I had that happy news to take him. I—I like to remember how his face grew changed and softened while I was there."

In the silence that followed his words, Gerard could hear Lina's quick, pained breathing, but he only drew her hand tighter and closer in his own.

"And you will go to our mother's grave, Lina, and you will have a stone put above with her name on it, just as she saw that name upon the grave when she was married—there, as it is in my sketch. But here—in the chancel here, where the names of all our house have been emblazoned for so many years—hers must have its place. You will have it added, Lina, just below her husband's, with the title and the dates and all. The space is there, you know, and her name should be with his. She loved him, and was his first wife. I owe this to my mother. You will remember?"

"Yes, just as *you* will remember it," she said, still fighting with the fear which was growing more and more cruelly tangible.

"And you will do it for me, dear, just as I should have done it myself?" he added, with a quiet content in his voice. "But there is one thing more that you must promise me. Listen, Lina, and promise it solemnly, for I will not speak of it again. There is the stain of murder upon *my* name, so it must have no place among those of our house. Lina, make me this promise. While that stain rests upon my name (and I know now that it must be always there), no marble or stone shall be engraved for me."

"Gerard," the girl whispered, when she had promised (as she would have promised any thing he asked her), and laying her hand upon his brow, burning now, as it had been chill before, "what has given you this—this cold, I suppose it is?"

"Sometimes I fancy that I caught it that night in the church-yard," he answered, tiredly.

"Sometimes I fancy I have felt it coming on ever since I tried to escape. Don't think of it, love," he added, checking himself suddenly, when he met her troubled eyes. "When will they come to fetch you from me?"

"Miss Marjorie will be here soon, but not to take me from you, Gerard. I can never go."

"Lina," he said, looking up lovingly into her pale face, you look better than you looked that terrible day two months ago; and just as beautiful—more beautiful, I think, my little lily. I almost wonder that the people here who had known Sir Gerard Athelston did not see and remark upon your likeness to him. Could they think the beauty which they boast of, and which fills the house with portraits of him, was a common thing among our Cornish cliffs?"

Then Lina, glad to turn the subject from that other thought, told him of the vague idea of a resemblance which both Sir Neil and his mother had often puzzled over in vain.

"Even Miss Marjorie Castillain," she said, "was struck by it once; but she knew exactly of whose portrait I reminded her."

"Did she?" asked Gerard, thoughtfully. "But of course she never guessed why. Lina, I am so grateful to think that she will always be your friend. Your inheritance will bring you no truer blessing than her friendship, dear. If right had been done us in the years gone by, she—she might have been my friend, too; but it makes a coward of me, even now, to think of the breadth and depth and height of that *if*, while our lives have been— But that is over," he said, again checking himself at sight of the pain upon her face; "and, Lina, you will make up for all when our inheritance is yours. You will make up, as far as you may, for the long years that its owners have wasted. You understand, pet; you will understand it utterly when the power is in your hands. No need to tell my weak wishes to you, when your heart is always tender and warm for those who are poor, or solitary, or mistrusted, as—as we have been, my dear."

"Gerard, hush!—oh, hush!" she sobbed, falling on her knees beside the couch, and throwing her arms about him. "Hush! We will go together—together. If not, I can never go."

"But if the gates of another home—far, far brighter, and far, far more beautiful—are opened for me at the same time, dear," he whispered, softly, "could I choose High Athelston, even if the choice were mine?"

"But, Gerard, those gates are always open. Oh, don't leave me yet!" she cried, in the selfish anguish of this new grief.

"Not yet," he answered, with ineffable tenderness, "but too soon to make it worth while to take possession with you of your home."

"*Your* home, Gerard; you know it is *your* home, even at this moment."

"Not in the eyes of the world; and against I have made it all clear there, I shall be tired, and—and ready to long for possession of the one beyond. I wonder how soon I can see Sir Neil? Tell me of them all, Lina, especially of Colonel Stuart."

And she told him all the bright and pleasant things she could remember, while a look of quiet happiness stole into his worn face.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARJORIE DECIDES.

Marjorie Castillain had driven Mrs. Esdaile's ponies so far along the Bleaborough road that Mrs. Esdaile's groom, from the seat behind her, felt it at last a duty to remind her where they were. Marjorie acknowledged the reminder with her quiet, pleasant smile, and slowly turned the ponies' heads back toward Churchill. Even when they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, she waited still in her seat, so unwilling was she even yet to disturb the brother and sister.

At last, rousing herself from her long, sad reverie, she gave the reins to the groom, and went up to the door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage.

"Yes, they are together there, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, quite gently, in answer to Marjorie's question. "I keep in here quietly; they don't want *me*. I was glad in my heart to be able to help a little when he first came; to put a fire (for he was starved, as if it was December instead of May), and something of that; but I'm not wanted now."

"And you, Jet, have you seen him, dear?" asked Marjorie, with her gentle hand on the child's drooping head.

"He would be there all the time, if he could, Miss Marjorie," said Dorcas, with a wonderful softening smile upon her face; "but we know—Jet and I both know—what quiet is worth for those that are ill and tired. So we wait a bit."

With her own eyes growing a little dim, as she met those of the woman whom she had always known hard and callous until the story of Gerard's life had stirred her, Marjorie turned quietly away, and tapped at the door of the other cottage.

"It is good to have you back, Mr. Spendir," she said, as she stood with her hand in Gerard's; her pitiful eyes betraying, against her will, their sad surprise at the change in him.

"It is good to see you, even for a moment, in this room," he said, a feverish color mounting to his cheeks.

"I will stay a little if you will take your old place," she returned, sitting easily down beside the couch. "Lie back, just as you were lying when I came in, and then I can feel that I may stay more than a moment. I promised to come for Lina; but I know it would be useless to ask her to return with me, unless you came too."

Gratefully Lina smiled her thanks.

"I could not leave Gerard," she answered, almost in a whisper.

"Miss Marjorie," he said, "I have never seen you since you spoke so kindly and so bravely for me in court. May I thank you now? for the remembrance of your words is as clear to me yet as it was on that first day. And I want to tell you how I did it—yes, please let me; I want to tell it you myself; the rest—all about this last journey of mine, and its result—Magdalen will tell you afterward. We fought together, as they said, on the very brink of the pool. We had met there, and, in our anger and impatience, we hardly heeded where we stood. We fought equally, as the world would say—he had the greater skill and I the greater strength—but often and often since then—*always* since then—I have known that I had no real excuse in God's sight

for that deed, hardly more than I should have had if I had *known* that I flung him to his death."

"We all understand—" began Marjorie, earnestly; but he stopped her with a quick, beseeching glance.

"No, please, don't excuse me. I can have no excuse to offer presently before the Judgment-seat above. I had my own work to do; why did I think of his? Miss Marjorie," he continued, presently, "I should like you to know how often you lightened that work for me, and brightened the life I led here, giving me a little glimpse of what other men's lives hold."

"And I want to tell you, Gerard"—Marjorie spoke in grave and unaffected simplicity, as if she knew this talk between them was no ordinary talk, and needed no ordinary forms—"how you have helped me (without knowing it) in making my own life a little less useless. But—but, after all, I can not tell it you, I see. Gerard," she broke off, "you have found that church, and proved Sir Gerard's first marriage. I knew what you went to do, and I have been almost as anxious as Lina. I can see that you have succeeded, and I expected it, for I always felt the story was a true one. Ah, how different all our lives might have been, if this truth had never falsely and wickedly been concealed! But I must not stay longer and weary you," she added, seeing how the feverish color came and went upon his worn and tired face. Some time you will let me come again."

"I wish," said Gerard, leaning against the couch, when he rose to bid her good-bye, and speaking with grave earnestness; "I wish I felt sure you would be happy when—when you bear my mother's name. Let me think of it as my mother's name, Miss Marjorie, and to be one day yours! I wish I felt quite sure you would be happy then."

"How?" exclaimed Marjorie, while a bright flush mounted to the very roots of her hair. "Your wife will be Lady Athelston, Gerard."

He looked into her face, with a little of the old warm happiness in his eyes.

"It would not be worth while taking the title from Sir Neil, just for such a little while," he said; "it would only have to go back to him. And his wife, and his son's wife, and *his* son's wife, on and on, will be those who will wear my mother's title, though so much that has always gone with it must now go to Lina. I like to think of *you* wearing it, Miss Castillain. I—I only wish I knew or felt sure that it would bring you a great happiness, such as life sometimes holds for such as you."

"I wish you would never think of me as I am going to be," said Marjorie, with her rare wistfulness, "but always as what I am."

"I can not help thinking of the one, and trying to picture the other," Gerard answered. "I do so little now, that my dreams and idle fancies have all their own way, and I try to picture the future of those who have been so kind to me. Like Orlando—isn't it, Miss Marjorie?—I have been able to 'look into happiness through other men's eyes.'"

"If you ever care to fancy what *my* life will be, Gerard," the girl said, very softly, and almost solemnly, as she laid her hand in his, "I hope it will make the fancy brighter for you to know that it can never be so listless and heedless a life again as it always had been until I knew you and Lina. And you must *never* picture it as spent with Neil, for I never shall be Lady Athelston."

A startled surprise, almost amounting to pain, had at first filled Gerard's eyes as she spoke, and no answering words rose to his lips. Lina's heart beat painfully in the short, deep silence, the meaning of which neither of the girls could, either then or afterward, even faintly comprehend.

"Gerard, are you so sorry?" his sister asked, at last, only anxious for him to break this pause.

"So glad," he answered, just in his old, clear, happy tones, and now with all the old gladness in his smile.

Then Marjorie bid good-bye, and went; and as she drove slowly back, in the calm sunset light, her thoughts lingered still with the brother and sister, and she had no need to hide their sadness and hopelessness now, as she always would when any eyes could read and interpret them.

"How hard it was," she whispered to herself, as she turned the ponies slowly into the lawn at The Anchorage, "to hide from Lina the shock I felt at the first sight of him! Ah! the long anxiety, and the ceaseless work, and the meagre life, have told upon him now, as well as that horrible confinement before March. What can be done to counteract all these?"

And no smile came to Marjorie's face, even when Jack Esdaile ran up and sprung beside her in the carriage. The wheels rolled on lightly over the gravel. The rich, sweet breath of the hawthorn made the air fragrant around her. The red light, lingering in the western sky, shone dazzlingly on all the windows of the low, white house she loved as she had never loved her home. Upon the steps, against the rich background of clustering roses, Colonel Stuart stood waiting to receive her. And still Marjorie's face was grave and thoughtful, and, without giving up the reins, or leaving her seat when the ponies stopped, she asked if she might drive on to Hawkedale.

"Tell William to take his seat again, Colonel Stuart," she pleaded, with a glance at the groom, "and I will send the phaeton back by him."

"You may stay at home now, William," the colonel said; "I am going to drive on. Jack, run in, and, when those ladies are gone, tell mamma that I am taking Miss Marjorie home, and that Miss Chester is not coming back to-day. Say that Marjorie is coming again to-morrow, and that I will tell her every thing else when I return."

"Now, Miss Marjorie, will you tell me of them?" he asked, when she had moved her seat, and he had taken the reins.

So she told him all she thought of Gerard; all the hopeless thoughts which she had hidden before.

"It will weary him for me to go to-night," he said; "but I must bring him home with me in the morning. Rest and ease, with care and nourishment, will soon do their work in restoring a fine frame and constitution such as his."

"They may—please God they will," said the girl, still with the rare, sweet gravity upon her face which Colonel Stuart so often pondered over now.

"There is one thing which I must do at once," mused Marjorie through that solitary evening—

for Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were dining at Burton—"I must tell Neil what I told Sir Gerard Athelston—how funny it sounds!—this evening. It is due to him to know (now that others know it) how I can never be his wife. I will write to him in the morning. I fancy he must know—because now he understands what real love is—how impossible it would be that he and I should marry. He and I! so impossible it is; and he will see this as I see it, now that he knows how ungovernable one's love is."

CHAPTER XLII.

NEIL AND MARJORIE TELL THE TRUTH.

Colonel Stuart had been at the cottage all the morning, but had not taken Gerard and Lina back with him to The Anchorage, as he had intended, for Gerard was not fit to be removed. The colonel had sent at once for a physician from Bleaborough; but the chief prescription had been for rest, and the chief words had been pitying ones for Lina, when she read the hopelessness which his simple directions betrayed. And now the colonel had sauntered down the lane with him toward The Anchorage, where his carriage waited, and where he was to lunch.

"Did you send and ask Sir Neil Athelston to come, Lina?" asked Gerard, when they had been some time alone.

"Yes, dear. Jet went. It pleases him to do any thing for you. It seems his only pleasure just now."

"Dear little fellow," Gerard said, smiling as he used to smile upon the child. "It is such a joy to me to think he will be cared for always. His grandmother loves him really—doesn't she, Lina?—and you will have the power to do all that money can do for him, and the love to do it as no one else could. Lina, he is not like his father, is he?—is he, dear?"

The wistful questioning of the weak, low voice went to Lina's heart. She seemed to see, for the first time, how anxiously he had brought the child up in their poverty, looking always forward to his manhood.

"I should think his father, as a boy, must have been as unlike Jet as it is possible for any boy to have been," she answered, confidently.

"I think so—I hope so. I wish Sir Neil would come."

Then, almost as the words were uttered, Lina heard Sir Neil's step on the garden path. He came in quietly, a resolute look upon his face, such as Gerard had never seen there before.

"I did not know you were so ill," he said, standing beside the couch, and slowly withdrawing his eyes from Lina.

Then he ran his fingers through his curls, and looked longingly at the hat which he had taken off and put down as he entered; for Lina was gone now, and he was alone with the man of whom he had thought with contempt through many months, and it was no use trying to think of him with contempt now; and—and—what could he say? What had he been brought there to say? Why had Lina gone away, and where was she?

Lying on the bed upstairs was Lina, with her face hidden. To lie so, in silent, solitary prayer, was a rest unspeakable for the anxious girl, and so she did not move until the sound of the opening door reached her. Then she rose, drawing her hand a moment across her tired eyes, and went down-stairs again to take her place by Gerard's couch.

"Lina, Sir Neil bid me wish you good-bye. He would have liked to see you, but I knew you would not wish to come."

"No, Gerard."

Then there was a silence between them, which Gerard broke at last, with an anxious questioning in his voice.

"Magdalen, Sir Neil will not believe that you refuse to take, at once, the home and wealth that you inherit legally."

"*Never* without you, Gerard," she cried, in quick dissent.

"It is too late for me, dear. I told Sir Neil exactly what you said," he added, presently, almost as if in haste to break her silence; "and, Lina, he refused to take advantage of my death. He must have the title—he knows that, though he didn't mention it—but he resigns every thing else. Are you surprised?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly, "very much surprised—even now."

"Even now!" he echoed, with a smile. "Then it does not surprise you *now*, quite as it would have done some time ago?"

"No."

"He is going away, Lina," her brother said, watching her anxiously as he spoke. "His mother has a small estate in Scotland, and he says he shall go there. It is a farm smaller than many on the estate here, he says; but he shall find plenty to do; and he is going at once. He was making light of it all, but I don't know how far he meant it. I showed him the copy of our mother's marriage register, but he would not read it. He turned his eyes away, and then began to speak to me of you."

"Gerard dear, rest now," said Lina, tenderly laying her cool little hand upon his forehead; "you have talked so much. Let me read to you."

"Not quite yet; I want to tell you all before I rest. Sir Neil told me how long he had loved you, and how deeply; though you would never listen to him. He told me how wrong he knew he had been in telling you of this love while he was engaged to Miss Castillain, but how he had let it master him in his selfishness and idleness. He said that it would live through all his life, and that he should tell this at once to Miss Castillain; but that he should never mention it again to pain *you*. He knew himself unworthy of you—he had known it for long, he said—but his love had grown so strong within him that he could not root it out now; and then, more earnestly than I had fancied he could ever speak, he begged me to persuade you to go home to High Athelston as its mistress, and to give his mother a home with you there. Lina, how strange it was to hear this from his lips, I can not say. Dear, will you go?"

"Oh! Gerard, hush!—please, hush!" she entreated. "Let us be together."

"Sir Neil wants High Athelston to have its own mistress," he went on, as if by a great effort, "and to be ruled and governed only by her orders; and he will have the truth made known

at once; though I pleaded that it should lie with us at present, because I shall never have a claim to make, and you do not wish to make one—while I am—with you. I hope he will be persuaded by Colonel Stuart, as he will not listen to me. It will make little difference, after all, if your home is his mother's still—as it would naturally be—for he will all his life be the baronet, Lina."

"Oh, Gerard," she interrupted, the cry wrung from her in her sore fear and pain, "I can not bear this! Oh, if God will only leave us together, or take us together! Gerard, I dare not lose you; do not talk of that time."

"Pet," he said, with a flash of the old brightness in his eyes, "I want you to give me one of the blocks from that drawer—a prepared one, and a well-pointed pencil. It is *so* long since my fingers have been at their old task, and just now I feel as if they had their old strength and power. May I try?"

She brought him the block and pencil, standing by in speechless hope to see him take them in his hands. A few nervous strokes he drew; then, with a little laugh, he held the block more firmly, and bent above it, trying with intense care to make some of his old touches of delicate shadowing.

"No," he said, after a few minutes' effort, looking up into his sister's disappointed eyes; "no, the strokes will not come as I wish them. Look at these wild outlines."

"They remind me of our own Cornish cliffs," she said, brokenly, crushing back her tears.

"Do they?" he asked, absently. "Lina, do you remember that last day in Cornwall—our birthday—when we went to the islands? And do you remember what Miss Castillain said of them on the day you found me by the mountain lake?"

"Yes, I remember it all," whispered Lina, "and the bright picture Colonel Stuart gave us afterward. I remember that day so well, and how you worked among us while we idled there."

"Oh, Lina, if it had only been told me that day, as it was told to you, that under the waters of that quiet little pool there lurked a certain death!"

"Shall I put away the block?" she asked, gently turning that subject aside.

"Yes, I can not do it, though I fancied so wildly that I could. Yes, take it, dear. It is not a very manly thing to own to, is it?—but I am tired, really tired. Lina, what is that hymn which tells us that the rest will be longer than the toil? Oh! such a recompense! Short toil—eternal rest. Can you sing it to me?"

While she sung, sweetly and softly, sitting beside him with his hand in hers, and her eyes turned from his patient, resting face, Neil Athelston walked rapidly to Hawkedale, and asked to see Marjorie. She should hear the truth at last from his own lips—the truth so long kept hidden in his cowardice.

Miss Marjorie was alone in the drawing-room. So the old servant said; and Neil, with the privilege of her affianced husband, entered the room unannounced. Marjorie was writing at her desk, but when she saw him she rose with a smile.

"Neil!—how strange! I was just then writing to you."

Week after week, month after month, they had put off telling of the conviction which had been growing so strong within them; and now the reserve had broken for both on the same day. Without seeing a word of the letter, Neil knew what she had written; and before a word passed his lips, Marjorie knew what he had come to say. And they looked into each other's eyes, and at that moment understood each other, as they had never done through all the years that they had been betrothed.

"Marjorie, I think you know what I have come to say," he began, humbly; "you look as if you knew it, dear; but, in any case, I must tell you now. Marjorie, my faith and fealty to you have been, for a whole year, worthless—worthless as all belonging to me has been. I will not tell you how earnestly I hope it will be different now; what right have I to believe that you care? I will not tell you that your own life will be happier spent apart from mine; what right have I to speak of that? I can only tell you the simple truth. I have let a new love fill my heart. I have learned now that the affection I offered you was not what I thought it was, and what it ought to have been. Marjorie, you know who has worked this change in me. Lina—Athelston will never accept the love which I pressed upon her when I insulted her in every such word I uttered, but it must be hers always now; and—and knowing its strength within me, I know it is the only love which I can offer my wife."

"Yes, I know it too," said Marjorie, in her ready, genial tones, but with a gentle compassion in her eyes. "I am so glad you have told me this yourself, Neil; I have been long hoping you would do so. I knew what you had to tell, but I would not say it for you. I waited for you to tell it me yourself."

"And you saw how cowardly I was in shrinking from this?"

"Yes, Neil," she answered, brightly; "and I was cowardly myself, too. How could I be sure that papa would not advertise, 'I do hereby give notice that I disown my daughter Marjorie, in consequence of her disobedience in the matter of taking a husband.' I saw just such an advertisement yesterday in an old register; and it sounded very like papa. Just think what my chances would have been after that! Neil, aren't you afraid of a similar act on the part of your mother? If Lady Athelston would only marry papa now, they might work out personally their own ends and aims! 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, don't you think?"

"It would hardly consummate their own ends, would it?" asked Neil, too really grave to enter into the spirit of her words, and too really fond of her to bear this separation lightly, as she seemed to do. "High Athelston was to be the gainer by *our* marriage, Marjorie—High Athelston and its master."

"Thank you, Neil," she answered, quietly; "but our parents' schemes have gone agley—as the best laid will, you know, whether of mice or men—or even women. Our loves were beyond their reach, little as they imagined it."

"Marjorie," said Neil, thinking it best to say as little as he could of either Mr. Castillain or Lady Athelston, while his thoughts were so sore, "it is sorrowful work saying good-bye to you."

"Where are you going, Neil?"

She asked it anxiously, but with very little surprise. She knew that he was not even now the real master of High Athelston, and she could sympathize with his crushed ambition as well as with his hopeless love.

"To Scotland, Marjorie. Where else could I go? What other home have I a right to claim?"

"I hope it is not to be a very long good-bye," she said, with a smile, as she gave him her hand. "I shall miss you greatly; we are such old friends, are not we? Don't stay away from us all very long. Neil"—the young voice which had struggled to be cheery grew low and sad again—"have you seen Lina and her brother to-day?"

"Yes, I saw her for a moment; she soon went away, as she always does from me. He sent for me, and I was with him while he told me—all that he had to tell," he added, hurriedly.

"It is sad to see him, is not it?" asked Marjorie, showing in her face how well she understood what this *all* was. "He used to look so strong and stalwart, one can not help thinking what a long course of hard work and self-denial it must have been which has brought him to this; and one can not help fretting over it. Yet he does not; he seems as brave and ready to meet death, Neil, as he was brave and ready to meet the trials of his life."

"Colonel Stuart was going back to him when I came away, Marjorie," he said, avoiding a direct answer to her words; "I am glad he is so true a friend to them both. It struck me from the first as such a characteristic of Stuart that he should be the one to have helped"—not yet could he bring himself to utter Gerard's name naturally enough to venture it to Marjorie—"to have helped in the gathering of that sum which was to have repaid the imaginary debt to old Mr. Esdaile."

"Yes, just characteristic of him," replied Marjorie, with a wonderful, quiet gladness in her eyes.

Then they bid good-bye—a good-bye the memory of which was pleasant to them both through all the after-years. And Neil fancied, as he walked slowly back on the familiar way, that if Sir Gerard Athelston's son had inherited his rightful name and home, the fulfillment of old Mr. Castillain's pet scheme would have been easier to Marjorie.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GATE OF TEARS.

The greater part of each day was spent by Marjorie Castillain, and Colonel Stuart or Mrs. Esdaile, at the cottage in Nether Lane. No one else could share Lina's grief; at the coming of no one else did Gerard's face brighten as it brightened at the coming of these friends who had been his friends through all. Still, they knew that there were hours and hours when he would be happier alone with his sister, and then they never intruded into the silent room. Sometimes, for a whole morning, Marjorie would sit down-stairs talking to, or quietly helping, Mrs. Cheere (who took the work of the house, as well as the work of the hired nurse, upon herself, and, both mentally and bodily, "went softly"), and then would walk homeward, only having left a silent kiss on Lina's lips, and a whispered word or two for Gerard. But there were other times, when she would linger in his room for hours, with that bright sense of ease which peculiarly belonged to Marjorie, and made her seem at home wherever she might be.

It was on the last morning in May that Colonel Stuart, buried in anxious thought, walked alone to the cottage. He had spent most of the previous night beside Gerard's bed, and he knew that the end was drawing near. It would be a calm and peaceful end; but none the less sad for those who witnessed it, and who knew what the solitude afterward would be for the twin-sister.

So Colonel Stuart was thinking, when he reached the cottage-door, and looked down upon a pitiful little object. Jet, with his head held tightly in his hands, was sobbing without a sound, while his whole frame shook and trembled in the emotion which was unchild-like in its intensity.

Colonel Stuart, with his arm about the shaking little form, was whispering his few cheering words of comfort, when Lady Athelston came through the cottage-door, her face unusually pale, and with the mark of tears still on it. He turned to walk with her down the garden; then, in his quiet, soothing way, he asked for Neil.

"He is gone," she answered, understanding this question, as he knew she would, from the motion of his lips, "and I am desolate without him. But Miss Chester is coming back—some day—when— Oh, I have felt so miserable in there! He ought to be at High Athelston. If he is to die, he should die at High Athelston! Should not it be so, Alick?"

"It matters little," he answered, with a smile she could understand, whether she guessed rightly at the words or not.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you will not go up to him? He has been disturbed much to-day; and is very tired, Marjorie says. She herself is waiting down-stairs. See! she is sitting at the window there, and will not go up unless she is called."

"I understand," he said. "I will walk a little way with you, Lady Athelston."

Whether she heard his answer or not, she was glad to take his offered arm; for the tears and distress of this morning had left her weaker even than usual, and, with a feeling of unwonted delicacy, she had come alone.

Even when he returned, after leaving her at the entrance to the park, Colonel Stuart saw that Marjorie still sat beside the window; but her head was not bent now: it was raised as if she listened to some sound far off. So he paused a minute at the gate, looking thoughtfully away among the shadows of the overarching elm-boughs, and just then Dorcas came from the cottage behind him, and throwing her arms about the sorrowing child, she took him tenderly into her own home, and closed the door upon their weeping.

Upstairs, in the room where Gerard lay, the silence had been the hush of peace, and not despair. Lina's eyes, as she sat beside him, were fixed upon his face with a yearning that was unutterably sad in its intensity; but his were far away just then, out among the sunlit leaves and pure white clouds; and the yearning that was in *them* had no sadness in it.

They were both silent, as they were so often now, in that hushed, expectant silence in which the living and the dying feel so keenly the great gulf between them, yet feel so mercifully the one Hope which spans this gulf.

It was Gerard who broke the silence at last, speaking softly, as his eyes came back from their long gaze, and rested on the pale and wistful face beside him.

"Lina, I am so glad, so very glad that you have consented to go back—I mean to go home—to High Athelston."

"You asked me, Gerard," she said, wearily. "Can I do any thing but what you wish?"

"Lady Athelston is really fond of you, my pet," he went on, seeking for all the comfort that the thought could give them, "really fond of you; and I can see a happy life in store for you—a happy life such as you have never known, my little sister."

She tried to answer brightly the tender questioning of his eyes, but she could not.

"Lina," he said, presently, "I want—I want you to give me my Order of License; my ticket of leave, I mean, dear. It is always in a hidden pocket of my coat. I had to carry it about with me, and I always made the pocket myself: such a cheery task, Lina."

One passionate, grievous sob burst impetuously from the girl's heart as she rose and looked where he bid her. Never had she seen the paper she sought, and now, of all times, how could she bear to look upon it? Tightly she clasped her fingers round the folded sheet, and brought it to him with her face averted.

"Even now, can it give you pain to look upon it?" he asked, with a smile which showed how little pain it could give him. "Why, Lina, if it had not been given me, where should I have been now? Not here with you, my darling. Eight years, this order says, and not six of them have passed yet. I should have been there still but for this paper which you will not look upon. Yet even I, Lina, until to-day, have not dared to open it since it was given me. I felt that if I saw the words before my eyes, I must tear them into atoms. But now it is different. I think I could read them now."

He held the paper open in his hands and tried to follow the words. Lina had buried her face upon the bed, and did not see how the effort failed.

"The lines swim before me," he said, shading his eyes with one hand. "What is it, Lina? 'Her Majesty is graciously pleased to grant to Gerard Dymocke, who was convicted of Forgery at the—' No, I can not read that; for it brings back, even yet, the isolation and the constant weariness, and, above all, the terrible degradation. But what is this, Lina, above the seal? 'And her Majesty hereby orders that the said Gerard Dymocke be set at liberty within thirty days from the date of this order.' How well I remember those thirty days, Lina! The man who worked next me had no such liberation to look forward to; and so I used—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Lina, raising her anguished face, and passionately crushing the parchment under her fingers. "Oh, Gerard, I dare not remember that time—to-day."

"For me," said Gerard, softly, "it should be good to remember it to-day. The liberty was given me for—" He broke off suddenly, seeing her piteous suffering. "Lina, I will think of it no more. Will you burn that for me? I need it no longer. Let me see you destroy it."

And she burned it; standing to watch it consume because he watched it, though she did so in a passion of weeping which she tried in vain to suppress.

"My dear, my dear, the greatest grief through all was, that *you* should have to bear the dishonor I had brought on this name of ours; and that you must fight alone that battle of life which I once felt so strong to fight for you. Oh, Lina, what a shattered plan mine is! But, darling, even of these fragments One Hand can make a perfect plan at last; and *you* will do the work for which I was not worthy."

"Gerard, Gerard, I can not bear it! Oh, my brother, talk of other things!"

A little silent pause, while her face was hidden on his wasted hands; then he spoke with his old brightness, only the tones were so low and weak:

"Lina, do you remember the first time I took you out to sea alone, and how I could not frighten you?"

"You never could frighten me, Gerard."

Not a word more of the separation that was coming; not a word more of the life she was to live without him; only loving, cheery memories now of that life which they had spent together long ago before the clouds had gathered about them. And the anguished weeping ceased at last, and the girl's eyes (brave in their grief) could look again, without their blinding tears, into the patient ones upon the pillows.

Higher and higher rose the sun, in all the brilliance of its morning strength.

"Lina, I want to see Jet once more."

"He is here, dear Gerard. I will fetch him, if you are not too tired now."

"Not—not too tired."

Jet came in, treading softly, and with his small hands tightly locked before him, in the determination to hold back his tears, at cost of any struggle. And then the young man and the child looked into each other's eyes, until there grew there the old, quiet light of laughter which had been so familiar in the busy days which they had spent together in these little rooms.

"Laddie," said Gerard, presently, with a beautiful, tender smile, which the child never could forget through all his life, and, kissing the sorrowful little face as men but rarely kiss, "don't forget me. Try not ever *quite* to forget me, and some day we shall find each other again—and know each other, I hope—in our Father's home. Good-bye, laddie; kiss me once again—the last of the kisses that used to be so pleasant to me."

And still the child could keep back his tears, while he stood there, knowing he looked his last upon the man who had taken him generously into his warm heart, when there was no one else in all the world to do so; but Gerard heard the sobs burst forth beyond restraint when Lina led the boy tenderly away.

The sun rose higher still, strong and untiring in its course, and the bright spring day was nearly in the zenith of its beauty.

"Lina," said Gerard, as he lay looking out into the far, calm blue beyond the floating clouds, "long ago, in those weary days among the convicts, I used to get weak and tired sometimes at

nights—not often, dear, but sometimes; so exhausted that I used to fancy the possibility of dying there, and—to fear it, Lina. I feared the agony of death itself; I feared the—the judgment afterward; fancying God's verdict might be what man's had been. Now all fear is gone. I know how He who is the highest in judgment does not judge us as we judge each other. So I have no fear, my darling—only peace. Is not this knowledge worth the pain which taught it me, dear little sister—the pain which is not great for me to-day?"

But she could not answer the words whose truth was so intense, even while they were uttered in physical pain.

"I will not ask you to read again," he said, touching the Book which lay upon the bed, and looking sadly into her wide and pitiful eyes; "but will you sing to me? I love to hear your voice, my darling. Sing of the Kindly Light."

The last notes died softly in the hush, and Gerard's thoughts seemed far away—as far, perhaps, as where was breaking, even now, that morn of which she had been telling.

"Lina," he said presently, turning to her with his own bright smile, "you remember how we sung together, in the old days when we fancied we were very lonely children—lonely with each other! Oh, how often have some of the words come back to me in your own dear voice! I should like to sing with you once again if I can. Will you begin, darling? You know the hymn you spoke of last night."

Gazing out among the sunny leaves, because she could not trust herself to look into his face now, Lina sung,

"Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?"

And he, his white lips weak and tremulous, took up the words and notes, and softly sung the answer,

"Come to me, saith One, and, coming,
Be at rest."

Through each verse those answering lines grew fainter and fainter, while Lina's sweet tones struggled through her tears,

"If I find Him, if I follow,
What His guerdon here?"

A very whisper now was the answer from the sinking voice,

"Many a sorrow, many a labor,
Many a tear."

Softly Lina's question followed,

"If I still hold closely to Him,
What hath He at last?"

"Sorrow vanquished, labor—ended—"

Lina, in a very passion of weeping, hid her face upon the bed now, for the dying voice had ceased.

The sun had risen to its midday height, and was shining in its fullest splendor, and in the meridian of its strength and power. Both Gerard's weak hands were clasped in Lina's, and she spoke to him softly and wistfully, as if, in the hush of the angel's presence, she could detain him by her clinging, sorrowing love. And he looked into her face with a light in his eyes more beautiful than any smile, but he could not speak, for his breath was slow and failing now.

And then, as she looked, he fancied that her kneeling figure and her yearning face were drifting from him slowly, slowly; that the room was widening for him into infinite space. And then the angel stood between them.

All over now, and there was rest unspeakable for Gerard. Only twenty-eight! But there are many men who tell their fourscore years, and yet live less than he. Only twenty-eight! But He who closed the tired eyes before the sun began to sink, knew how the burden and heat of the day had been borne.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WANTED, NEXT OF KIN.

"NEXT OF KIN.—JELFREY. The next of kin of Eustace Jelfrey, who died in Africa, are requested to communicate with Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

That was the advertisement which attracted the attention of both Colonel Stuart and Marjorie Castillain on the very morning of Gerard's death, neither of whom, however, broke in upon Lina's solitary grief to show it to her.

By the same day's post, the colonel wrote to Messrs. Beard and Cartwright, describing Jet's relationship to Eustace Jelfrey, asking for further particulars, and inclosing the address of his own solicitors. The reply was to the effect that the particulars which Colonel Stuart had kindly furnished had been forwarded by Messrs. Beard and Cartwright to their client, whose further commands they awaited.

"We will not show it to Lina, nor tell her we have written, until a further answer comes, Marjorie," Mrs. Esdaile said. "Only you and I and Alick know, and we may save her disappointment."

On the very day after Gerard's funeral, Lina started for Cornwall, and Mrs. Cheere and Jet accompanied her. She was very glad of this. She was not yet strong enough to bear the responsibility, as well as the fatigue, of traveling; and it was much better for her to have the care and attention of the woman who had grown to love her for her brother's sake, than those of a maid. As for the child, she was glad indeed to have him with her, for she loved him for her brother's sake, and she longed for her grandfather to know Gerard's boy. So the thoughtful plan, concocted between Marjorie and Dorcas, succeeded admirably; and the fatigue of the journey, as well as the duties which awaited her at Tresean, were lightened wonderfully by Mrs. Cheere. They were lightened even by Jet, too, for the teaching of childhood had fitted him well for such tasks as he now loved to perform for Lina and her sick grandfather.

More than three weeks Hiram Dymocke lived, through Lina's ever-watchful, ever-tender nursing; then he died peacefully, with his wife's name upon his lips, and the hand of his daughter's child in his. And when the old man's will was read, it was found that, at the earnest desire of his granddaughter, he had left all which by right she should have inherited to the adopted child of his late grandson, to be invested for him, as his guardians approved, but not used till he came of age. Then a grave in the church-yard

(far removed from that one beneath the wall, which was no longer nameless) was closed for the last time, and Hiram Dymocke lay beside his wife; the clouds and suspicions which had separated them for years all scattered and melted now.

On their return to Highshire, Mrs. Cheere and Jet settled quietly down again in the white cottage in Nether Lane, and Lina took up her abode with Lady Athelston at High Athelston. It cost her a great struggle to do this, because she knew her presence would keep the mother and son apart; still, she could not forget that she had promised Lady Athelston, in Gerard's presence, nor could she pretend to be ignorant that it would be a relief to Neil's mother to have her to depend upon once more; nor how she, too, longed in her loneliness to be near those few true, tried friends, who had been so kind to her and to Gerard.

So she went, and the weeks passed on until the autumn-time, bringing no changes but those subtle ones which we pass by almost unnoticed. Lina was indeed like a daughter to Lady Athelston, giving her a daughter's care, almost a daughter's love, and quite a daughter's obedience. No one knew what useless, though pleasantly sustained, frauds were her grave consultations with Lady Athelston, when any plans were mooted for the estates or tenantry; and those pet speeches of the little real mistress of the house. "I will ask Lady Athelston what she will wish done;" "I will speak to your mistress, and let you know what she decides." No one knew what hollow little fictions were those orders which she represented as Sir Neil's, when the agents told her he refused to give any directions by letter, and always referred them to her. No one, on all the estate, knew what an absolute little mistress Lina was made to be, even while she gave these commands which purported to be Sir Neil's or Lady Athelston's; nor was any one ever allowed to see Lady Athelston's utter dependence upon her. With noble, womanly, delicate tact, Lina hid this, while she did, most anxiously, all she could do in her new and trying position.

It was not often that Sir Neil wrote to her—rarely, except in answer to those letters which asked for his wishes in certain matters—but when he did, he could make his letters pleasant to her; and he never let them speak one word of love, or of disappointment, or of dissatisfaction for his isolated life. They were always simple and manly, but nothing more; for Neil had never possessed Gerard's hopefulness and bright content.

Colonel Stuart had, two or three times, been to see him in Scotland, and had always brought back a cheery description of his farm and his busy life.

"It is a model farm, even for Scotland," he used to say; "and Neil is always doing something; not that Neil, even yet, knows very much about it all; but he is steadily determined to learn, and he does not shun work. It is more praise, too, than you can imagine it to be, when his bailiff (himself an educated fellow, and an experienced farmer) pronounces him improving."

"Poor Neil!"

"Not poor," the colonel would answer, smiling at Marjorie's pet term; "there is no *poor* look about him. He looks twice as well—and as handsome, too—as he used to look lounging in the billiard-room and drawing-rooms at High Athelston; and if his hands are not so white and soft as when he drove his favorites in Hyde Park, I can tell you they have gained in strength and skill."

Marjorie's letters to Neil were more frequent than Lina's, and longer by far. She loved to send him droll pictures of old familiar places and people; comical incidents of her own home life; long, chatty accounts of life at High Athelston, and every little bit of news she could gather. So well she knew what a trial was this new life for him, after the gayety and splendor and adulation of his whole past existence! So well she understood how hungry he would be for home news now! But amusing as her letters were, they always helped him, too; strengthening him, and cheering him, as well as giving him just that relief of hope which they were intended to give. And when he told her so, and thanked her, he pleased her as no words of his had ever pleased her in the old days of their betrothal.

It was to him that Marjorie was writing on a certain autumn day, when Lina entered the library and sat down to rest beside the fire. Marjorie was staying at High Athelston, as she often staid even now, for Lady Athelston and Lina both loved to have her there, and knew, too, that her own home was even less bright for her than it used to be. Before she finished her letter, she turned and spoke to Lina.

"Any message for Neil?"

"I was just thinking of him," the girl answered, simply; "I suppose because I guessed to whom you were writing; or—perhaps because his mother has been talking of him, and wanting him."

"It would be so much better for him to come home, wouldn't it?" asked Marjorie, waiting eagerly for the reply.

"I don't know. He knows best."

"Do you tell him how his mother frets for him, Lina, and how her strength fails?"

"Yes, when I write."

"I suppose, then," returned Marjorie, with a little sigh, "that he is too busy to come. Colonel Stuart says he is always busy. Busy!—I can not tack the word to Neil in my mind even yet. Colonel Stuart is going to Scotland to-night."

"Why?" asked Lina, involuntarily.

"I do not know," was the slow answer; "unless he goes to see Neil. He would hardly start off on a couple of days' visit to that distance to any one else, would he? Yet I don't know, he has so many friends and fellow-officers scattered over the kingdom. I am glad he is going away for a little, because he seems to be growing so quiet here. He has not cared to join in our petty gayeties lately, as he always used to do."

"Yet he is just the same," returned Lina, earnestly, "kind and good and helpful to all."

"Yes; he could not be otherwise. Why, he makes even Hawkedale pleasant when he is there; and it is not, you are well aware, a naturally pleasant place, less so than ever now. Papa still refuses to believe that my engagement with Neil is canceled, and insists on talking of it, on purpose to prevent the possibility of any one imagining it over. And he *makes* me listen to him until I burn with shame. Oh, Lina, it is so bitterly humiliating! and there is nothing in

life to make up for it. Even you, my lonely child, are scarcely so unutterably lonely as I am. You are of use, and you are loved, although you have no relations. I am neither, though I have father and sister. But you are good; *that* must make all the difference."

Such a speech from Marjorie struck Lina as sadly as desponding words always do strike us from lips that are used to fun and laughter.

"I wish sometimes," continued Marjorie, very low, "that they would drift away—all the wearisome things around me, all the wearisome tasks before me—that it would all be over, Lina."

"Oh, Marjorie, I am so grieved to see you sad!" she whispered, lovingly. "This mood is so unlike you."

"Unlike! Why? Because I am one of those thoughtless girls who never seem to know what gloom is?" asked Marjorie, with a quick laugh. "Why, we are just the very ones who suffer most from this dismal mood—what shall I call it—reaction? Just the very ones to suffer most heavily and despondently, when we do suffer from it at all. But it will soon pass with me; for it had no business to come; and I am not, even yet, quite the one to nurse such a feeling, though it may master me for the time. I shall—ah, Lina, you are sent for. Lady Athelston has not given you a long recess, has she? While you are away, I will finish my letter; then, if you are not here, I will come to you."

But Marjorie seemed in no hurry to finish the letter. Left alone, she leaned her head on her hands, and let her thoughts have their own way. Sad enough these thoughts were, as minute after minute she sat there, alone and listless.

"I will try, I will try to be better," she whispered to herself at last, raising her head and pushing the hair from her temples; "I will try, and then I shall be happy—at least I suppose so. Louie will be married soon, and then perhaps papa will be kinder to me, as I shall be the only daughter he will have with him. Poor Louie!" sighed the girl, with a look of real pity in her eyes; "I would rather, ten hundred times, live alone with papa at Hawkedale, than marry such a poor little vain nonentity as Lord Lythwood. Poor Louie! But—but how sad it has been ever since Gerard Athelston's death!"

"Colonel Stuart."

He came forward, with his easy at-homeness, as Martin closed the door upon him; but Marjorie felt the color rise in her face as it had never done before at his approach—almost as if she had been detected in wanting him.

"I am going to Scotland, Miss Marjorie," he said, standing at the fire, with his back to the desk on which her unfinished letter lay, "and I want to know if you have any message to intrust to me for Neil. I am going to try to bring him home with me."

Frankly the girl met the searching glance bent upon her.

"I do not think he will come," she answered, simply.

"May I not take him what he is waiting for, Miss Marjorie—the assurance of your wish to see him?"

"Mine?" she echoed, the ready color rising once again, and her eyes drooping, with a rare shyness, beneath his questioning gaze. "You are—mistaken; he does not wait for mine, Colonel Stuart. Neil Athelston and I have broken that long engagement of ours."

"But—but your father says that report is false."

"Yes, I know he does," replied Marjorie, quietly. "It is his pleasure to say it, and insist on it; but that can never piece the broken thread again. Have you known the squire so long, Colonel Stuart, to be now surprised by his insisting that I have no mind of my own?"

There was a laugh upon her lips, though a tremulous one; but his were very grave indeed, and his eyes intent upon her as he spoke again.

"Miss Marjorie, have I been wrong in my fancy all this while, that Neil's loss of wealth could make no difference in *your* love for him?"

"Such a fancy, whether it has been yours or not, could not be wrong," she answered, quietly. "No loss of wealth could have made *any* difference in my love for him, if love had been really love on either side. But it was not. Can you understand? The knowledge of this has been slow in asserting itself to either of us, but it has been almost always there. It would have been told nearly two years ago, only that we were both cowards."

Because he did not answer those earnest words, she looked with surprise into his face.

"Colonel Stuart, you don't rebuke me as you always used to do, and I can not recognize you so. Please to scold me, and have it over."

"I can not," he answered, gently. "Even in old times it was very hard, but now it seems impossible. Marjorie, you will never understand what made me often seem so hard and stern to you. Your words and acts were always more to me than those of any one else in the world, and this I was obliged to hide. I had the grief of seeing you behave to every one with more gentleness than to me, yet I dared not show the pain this gave me. I fancied that I understood better than any one the many sterling qualities which you so often either hid or marred, and—I loved you for them with all my heart and soul. Yet I never dared encourage this thought, or love—knowing that you were promised to Neil."

"I never could have married Neil," said Marjorie, in a tremulous whisper, as the shy, brilliant color burned in her cheeks, "even though I had promised."

"I have listened while you spoke to those you loved, as you *could* speak, Marjorie, with all your kind heart in your voice and eyes, and I have tried to fancy what it would be to *me* to listen to such words from you; but—as you know—you were always different to me."

"Always," faltered Marjorie, with sad gravity; "but if you know the reason of your own sternness, can you not guess the reason of my defiance? It was a poor, weak armor, after all."

"Marjorie! Marjorie!" he cried, with a wonderful new brightness on his face, "is this possible? Oh, my love, don't jest with me in this! I am too old a man to bear such a disappointment as you may be giving me now."

"However much I jested when you tried to teach me," she said, raising her eyes, in which the unshed tears were glistening, "I always tried to obey you in the end—because—I loved you."

"But, Marjorie," and the rare, slow tears of happiness were standing in *his* eyes, too, as he looked with questioning fear into her face—

"but, Marjorie, have you thought of this in any light but that of your own fearless generosity? Could you be happy with me, a comparatively old man, almost twenty years your senior?"

"Have *you* thought?" she answered, gently. "Could you be happy with a girl who all her life-long has been vexing and hurting you; who has never been made a companion of by any one; who always frets and repines if things don't go quite smoothly; who was in the very act of fretting and repining when you came in?"

"My love," he said, and drew her close within his arms, "you fretful! you repining!—my bright, brave girl! I feel now that we can never have really misunderstood each other for one moment, because we are so close together now. Ah, Marjorie, I never guessed of this happiness in store for me. How could I? How dare I?"

"Because you are so old?" she questioned, the old, gentle, tremulous drollery on her lips.

"Well, let us say I have a smack of age in me, like Falstaff," he said, laughing; "but I was not thinking then of that."

"You had forgotten it for one moment?" she asked, more earnestness than laughter on her bright, sweet face. "Then do not think of any other—grievance. I knew always," she went on, softly, "that you saw my faults more clearly than any one else saw them; and so how can I feel that this is true? Can you really love me as I am?"

"Dearly, dearly, my precious one. I loved you always, even as you were in your most random, and, to me, unkind moods. I could not help it, hard as I tried and tried. I could not help it."

"Colonel Stu—"

"Colonel?" he echoed, laughing, as he gazed with ineffable tenderness far down into her shy eyes. "Is that my name for you, Marjorie?"

"Alick," the word came very timidly from her lips, but very tenderly withal, "Alick, will you—what are those words?—will you 'be to my virtues very kind, be to my faults a little blind?' But you always are, with every one, and so I think the faults will be fewer. Those bad, mutinous thoughts, which used to come when you were near me—because I felt so very far away—can never come again."

"Marjorie," said Colonel Stuart, after a pause, "I wish I were taking to Neil just such a happiness as I have now in my own heart."

"We must wait," she answered, wistfully; "I do believe it will come—I do, indeed. And these waiting months are not wasted for him, are they?"

"Indeed they are not."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

As Christmas drew near, Lady Athelston, though not, perhaps, weaker than she had been through the autumn, grew more despondent about herself, and more fretful over her son's continued absence, considering it a kind of melancholy duty to insist on others sharing as much as possible in her own querulous gloom, whenever Lina's bright and cheering care would allow her to do so. And the girl, in the anxiety of her ever-wakeful grief, tried and tried in vain to see how it would be wisest for her to act; knowing all the time that only her own heart could counsel her—a poor counselor ever, when duty and pride and inclination all pull different ways.

Hour after hour, in those long winter evenings, while Lady Athelston dozed upon her couch, Lina would sit before the fire, in solitary thought, wondering and wondering what it would be right for her to do.

If only some voice would whisper to her distinctly what was best, she would sigh. If only some mark would lie upon the way she ought to take, so that this anxious doubt might be at rest. But no voice could be heard, and no mark seen; and it was all left to her own heart, as she said sadly to herself, while her beautiful, anxious eyes sought vainly, in the dim, red aisles among the glowing coals for that answer which could be neither heard nor seen.

And then Neil's mother would awake repining; (as inherently selfish people generally do), and would wonder fretfully why Lina's letters failed to bring Neil home.

"You must write again, Lina. Why will you not insist on his coming? If you had given my messages, I am sure he would have been here; unless"—with a quick, questioning glance into the grave face—"unless you told him you would go away from here if he came. You know I could not spare *you*, and it is very cruel of you to propose it. I can not spare you, but I want Neil too. Oh, Lina, bring him home, and do not go away yourself. If you do, I shall die, with no one to understand me or help me—still, I want my boy."

And Lina could only turn the subject gently aside, and lead the mother's thoughts where she delighted for them to revel, until she again forgot all but the simple, easy happiness which the girl's love and care had given her, and the relief it was to have such a bright, unselfish little companion about the great, quiet house.

But the strain it was upon Lina so to hide the anxiety which weighed upon her day and night told gradually upon her. And, now that Christmas was near, she looked as pale and harassed as she had looked in that illness of hers in the early spring.

Once—after a tiresome day, only brightened by a long quiet talk with Marjorie Castillain, which left its influence strong and clear behind—in among her puzzled thoughts there came a sudden, rapid decision, as such decisions sometimes will rush in, to end those doubts which trouble us long and incomprehensibly. She rose from her spell of wondering thought, and began at once to write to Sir Neil. She would not wait to allow the old hesitation a moment's time to creep in. She would write without one more doubt. Lady Athelston's tearful entreaties were still in her ears; Marjorie's mute question lingered in her memory, and while she remembered these she would write. Not one of those arguments which her own heart had urged, as she sat thinking and thinking before the fire in the silent room, should make itself heard again. "Not one," she repeated, wearily, as she took up her pen.

Very few words, and very simple ones, she wrote to Neil. His mother longed for him to be with her through the Christmas-time, she said, and yet did not like to spare her. So (the pen

lingered here, but the trembling little hand led it briskly on) would he come and spend it with them both? He had said he would not come until she asked him, and so now she asked him. Would he come?

It was such a short and simple letter to cause any quickened heart-beats! Lina sent it in haste to the post-bag. How could she ever let it go, if she kept it long enough to think the old thought even once more?

After that, it seemed as if the whole household was in a state of expectation through every hour of every day. Once at least every five minutes, Neil's mother started, and said she heard him; while she could not, poor lady, even hear the wild December wind.

It was on the wildest night of all the week—while they sat in the luxurious warmth of the brilliant drawing-rooms, where Lady Athelston would always sit now in state, awaiting him—that he came. Among the angry voices of the wind and rain, neither the carriage wheels nor the hurrying footsteps were heard. So they did not know he had arrived, until he came in to them, tall and grand and handsome as of old; yet where of old there had been only leisurely, indolent grace, there was a firm and steadfast quietness now which altered him wonderfully.

His mother started from her couch, and Lina rose to meet him, for he must pass her first. A longing, intent look he gave into her face as he held her hand one minute in his clasp; then he passed on for his mother's rapturous welcome; and when he turned again, the girl was gone. For the hour before dinner, the mother and son sat alone, and Lina only joined them again when the meal was announced.

There had not been such a merry dinner at High Athelston for months as this was, though Marjorie was not there. Martin, stepping noiselessly about the room, marveled over the change in his master. The twin canaries, with one eye always on each other's deportment, opened the other to the widest extent, and gathered an unusual amount of anecdote to retail. Lina looked into Lady Athelston's beaming face, and said to herself, Yes, it was best that she had written to Neil that letter which had brought him home. Then she, too, went back to wonder at the change in him, though it seemed slighter to her than to any one, because she had guessed it from his letters. But though her beautiful, dark eyes had a look of relief in them, now that he was come, they never once met his with just that frank, proud gaze which had so firmly kept back hope from his heart in the old time.

"Take my arm, mother. You have been so long without any temptation to lean upon me, that I want you to learn the lesson at once."

He had risen from the table as Lady Athelston did so, having evidently no intention of being left behind.

"But I am going to my own room now, dear; I must go, even though you are here," she said, deprecatingly. "Don't you hasten away with us, Neil. It is rather solitary for you; I wish I had invited Alick Stuart."

"I don't want Stuart," Neil said, gayly, as he led his mother from the dining-room. "I want only what this house contains."

As they passed slowly up the lighted staircase, Neil paused with a momentary hesitation before one of the portraits of Sir Gerard Athelston, and looked from it over his shoulder, for Lina loitered behind them. The vague, unacknowledged resemblance was all explained to him now.

He lingered in his mother's dressing-room until she would let him stay no longer; then he went back to the drawing-room, and waited for Lina. "Surely she will come back, if only to say good-night to me," he thought, walking to and fro upon the velvet carpet.

But she never came. Neil's eyes seemed fastened to the door, which he had purposely left open, but no girlish figure passed it. One of the canaries brought in the tea, and Martin hovered about it in his grave curiosity. Neil caught eagerly at this straw of an idea.

"Tea, eh, Martin?" he said, in actual dread of how much of his thoughts the old butler could guess. "I will go and tell the ladies."

Of course, Martin's countenance was unmoved as usual, but there was something very like a smile in his sensations.

"I will find her," thought Neil, with a kind of apologetic excuse for himself, "and tell her Martin is waiting for her to come to tea."

Not with his mother, who was placidly enjoying her beauty sleep; not gone to her own room, as Margaret said when he met and questioned her; not in the library, where two great fires were having the Christmas laugh and conversation all to themselves; not in— A sudden thought struck Neil; he had not yet been into the blue morning-room, where she had been fond of sitting, as he well remembered, in old times. Surely she would be there.

Without waiting to know whether his quiet rap had been heard, he entered. No lamps were lighted here, but the fire shed a soft gold light upon the dainty blue furniture, and upon a solitary little figure in black, lying with dreamy stillness in a wide arm-chair.

For a few moments Neil stood unseen, gazing, with all his heart in his eyes, at the beautiful, grave figure, wrapped and fondled in the rich, caressing light. Then he came forward, as grave as she, his blue eyes full of earnest love and untold longing.

He did not take a seat beside her, but stood opposite, against the low chimney-piece. Then he made his prepared and commonplace little speech, but he looked at her with as great a reverence as if the black-robed girl had been his queen, and the blue silk chair the very throne of England.

"Martin is hovering about the drawing-room with tea, Miss Athelston."

"I have taken tea," she answered, glancing at him with almost a startled glance. "I took it with Lady Athelston in her own room. I generally do."

"Then it may go," said Neil, quietly.

A little pause then; the girl leaning forward in her big arm-chair, with the intense stillness which, in her, was always begotten of any nervous dread or anxiety; the young man standing before her, big and tall and strong above his fellows, yet with his heart beating and his lips shaking like a woman's, because he felt that he was near her once again, and free to love her and to offer her his love. It was no insult *now* to lay at her feet the heart in which she had reigned alone so long.

He broke the silence presently.

"I have not yet thanked you for your letter. You can never even dream what joy it was to me to receive your summons home—I mean here."

"No—home," said Lina, only because he paused and waited for her words.

"Still less can you dream what joy it is to me to be here. How long may I stay?"

She looked up at him again with the startled gaze.

"You—you will know," she said, softly. "As long, I hope, as your mother wishes."

"Lina, you will forgive me that I do not speak as wiser men would do at such a time. From the first, dear, my love has been a cause of suffering to myself and to you; so I can hardly trust myself to look it in the face calmly, as other men might, and to tell you of it by degrees. I can only stay here, Lina, as—your husband. May I stay?"

The unusual quietness of his voice struck Lina oddly, while his face was white and trembling in the passion of his love.

"Sir Neil," she said, gently, as she rose in her desire to reach the door, "stay with your mother."

"And with you?"

The answer she had striven to evade was waited for with breathless eagerness. She smiled, a little nervous smile which rippled oddly on her lips, while her eyes were grave and serious.

"And with you, Lina?"

The question was repeated with a still greater eagerness, and the answer still more anxiously waited for.

It came in the softest whisper. "Yes."

"With you?—with you, Lina?—with my wife?" The questions rushed from his lips brokenly, in his joy. "Oh, my beloved! is it to be so?—will you be happy so?—for, immense as my love is, it shall not bring you misery again. My own love—my own and only love—can you be happy as my wife—my treasured, cherished wife? Can you? Just whisper it, as you whispered that other precious 'yes.'"

And she whispered it.

Closely and tightly he held her in his arms, with a protecting, fostering love; but the look of reverence still shone deep down in his blue eyes, as he drank his happiness thirstily from the pure and truthful depths of hers.

"My little treasure, won at last!" he murmured. "My priceless treasure! What a future you have given me, Lina! Without you, all my years would have been aimless, as were those years before I knew you. With you, it will be all different. Such a life mine may be now, perhaps, Lina, as the real master of High Athelston would have lived here."

These words she could not answer. Her grief had been too deep and solitary a one to have it brought back to her, even yet, by the words of others.

"I think of him often," the young man went on, gravely, "and I am always the better and the stronger for such thought. Now, we can talk together how he would have acted, and I know I shall make a better master, a better friend, a better man altogether, for trying to do as he would have done. You are stronger, my love—you are stronger and better, are you not?" he broke off, raising her drooping face, and gazing into it with untold fondness; "and your life shall be easy and restful now, as it has never been. Lina, Lina"—in a whisper of happy emotion—"look up and meet my eyes just once, and say you love me. No, that is too much for me to ask; look up and meet my eyes just once, and tell me that I may stay with you for always."

She looked up slowly, her eyes most beautiful in their perfect trust, and she answered him in clear, soft, happy tones,

"Neil, I want you to stay with me always."

Then with what deep and passionate gratitude did he hold her to his heart, while his lips clave to hers in their first kiss.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

The fire and lamp were burning brightly in Mrs. Cheere's little parlor, and at the table sat Jet, making, in his drawing-book, a rather distorted copy of one of the illustrations in Colonel Stuart's lately published work on Highshire—the one book which Dorcas prized; which she was among the first to buy (though such an expensive literary treasure she had never dreamed before of purchasing), and which was even already beginning to look worn and damaged from the contact of the untiring fingers which turned the pictured leaves.

Jet was stooping very much, and his brows were knitted; but even with those advantages he could not, as it seemed, obtain an artistic effect, for his rather smeared imitation of one of the Churchill views failed entirely in winning the approval of the little artist and critic himself—a sure sign that the boy had either real talent or a pure taste.

"Perhaps, granny," he said, meditatively, as he gave his pencil a suck which might be professional, but certainly was not elegant—"perhaps I might make it more like, if you could just help me a bit now and then, like—like father used."

"But, you see, I don't know any thing about it, dear. You must get on as well as you can by yourself at present."

The old woman's eyes were soft and gentle behind her spectacles, as she sat close to the child, knitting him stockings, and watching the progress of his work with the greatest interest, and the most pleasant and unconcealed ignorance of its defects. But his last words made her thoughtful, as his inadvertently uttered wish to learn any thing always did.

Ought she to send the boy away to school at cost of any loneliness to herself, while she knew she could not afford to send him to such a one as she let her thoughts build upon for him? Or ought she to send him every morning into Churchill, where the education would be still more widely different from that one on which she had fixed her hopes for him? For those quiet eyes behind the glasses could wander miles and miles away beyond the cottage-gate, and often did now, seeing wide, dazzling pictures of her boy's after-life; sunny scenes, in which he should work his life's work well and bravely, and where she should leave him some day, that she might go and tell it all to his mother in heaven, and to

some one else who had loved the child, and would remember him even there.

But at present it seemed that the start for him was unattainable. He ought to be at school, and at a good school; yet she could not afford it (for the money old Mr. Dymocke had left him was not to be touched until he came of age). Nor could she either bear to part with him, or to separate him from Jack Esdaile, who was not going to any public school until his father's return from abroad, and who, as Dorcas full well knew, was the best friend that her boy could have.

It was just as she was thinking of him, that Jack himself came into the room, with his bright, familiar, yet always courteous, greeting.

"Mrs. Cheere," he cried, letting his momentarily subdued excitement break out again, "please I'm come to fetch you and Jet to The Anchorage! Who do you think came to-day? Papa, yes, really papa—my own father, you know, Jet, who's been away for years. Yes, he's come, Mrs. Cheere, and he wants to see you—you and Jet. And the brougham's at the gate, and I'm to wait for you, and not take any refusal. Please come quick, Mrs. Cheere. Make haste, Jet. I long to show you my father. He's—"

The boy was suddenly stayed by the memory which Jet's wistful eyes had awakened. Had it been cruel to talk so gleefully of the return of his father to the child whose father never would return? He passed his arm lovingly through Jet's, and whispered to him, with a bright, affectionate smile,

"He wants particularly to see you, Jet. Do you know he seems as anxious to see *you* as he was to see me!"

Dorcas donned her best bonnet and muffled herself for the cold drive, then overlooked Jet's muffling.

"You both run down to the carriage while the light is here to guide you," she added, turning out the two little great-coated and comforted figures; "I'll leave the door open, and follow when I've put out the lamp and locked up."

"I'm glad he's come," she murmured to herself, as she waited to be sure of the last spark dying out, "for many people's sakes. Now, I suppose, Colonel Stuart and Miss Marjorie will be married. I knew she'd never go to be mistress at The Anchorage, to turn out Mrs. Esdaile, though she'd make up all kinds of excuses sooner than let *that* out. Yes, I'm glad enough he's come; but he can't really want to see us."

The eyes of Mrs. Cheere—so long accustomed to her own small rooms and small companion, and, more than that, coming straight in from the darkness of the winter night—were utterly dazzled in the drawing-room at The Anchorage, among what seemed to her a perfect crowd of happy, excited people. It took her a good many minutes, and two cups of Mrs. Esdaile's fragrant tea, to fit her to comprehend what they were saying.

"I little thought, as you may guess," said Colonel Stuart, after trying, in his kindly, easy way, to make it clear to her, "that the answer I sent to that 'next-of-kin' advertisement was destined for my own brother-in-law."

"I was delighted," put in Mr. Esdaile, pleasantly, "to find, when Messrs. Beard and Cartwright forwarded me the letter, that the next of kin I sought was to be found in the neighborhood to which I was soon coming. For that reason I did not answer the letter, wishing to bring the news myself."

"But—but, Colonel Stuart," stammered Dorcas, "how can it be? The advertisement was for next of kin of—Eustace Jelfrey."

"Yes," answered Mr. Esdaile, with a nod and a smile, "and it was *I* who had it inserted—another proof, isn't it, of the smallness of the world? Let me tell you now what I knew of Eustace Jelfrey," he said, as they all sat listening in the light and warmth. "I was sitting, one day, alone in my tent, writing home, just after deciding to leave the diamond fields altogether, when a man entered in haste and fear, and begged for a little water for his master. I happened to have a little, which I was then boiling to purify, for what we bought was sometimes the very filthiest. By sight I knew this man as the servant (or perhaps more properly the partner) of a young-looking, handsome man who had only lately landed and joined us, yet who had had already quite unprecedented and exceptional success."

"He always succeeded in every thing, I think," put in Marjorie Castillain, her bright eyes flashing angrily at the thought.

"But wait, Marjorie," interposed Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "until you hear the end."

"The end," resumed her husband, quietly, "would totally shatter any one's idea of success for him. I do not suppose it could fall to any man's share to witness such a death more than once; but I hope my own may happen before I have to be present at such another."

"Was there no repentance?" asked Colonel Stuart, with his arm round the child, who stood intently listening to this story of his father's death—the father whom he never had, and never could call so.

"No repentance. There was literally no power for it, so all-engrossing and all-dominant was the awful horror. There was not even faith enough for the very weakest thought of penitence. There was only the frantic, hopeless certainty that unknown horrors awaited him, horrors whose grasping power it was too late now to elude; and wild, ceaseless crying to know what these horrors could be. And, with these, always that burning, feverish thirst, which could not be appeased. Death had become familiar enough to me there—as you may judge when I tell you that between thirty and forty died among us every day—but such a death as this, thank God! could never grow to be familiar. It was so long in coming, too; just as if the strength of despair in the man could really keep the dreaded visitant at bay. For sixteen days he fought with fierce strength against the coming of death, and of that doom which he feared after death. I had taken the water to him at first (for I would not keep the man, even while I prepared it) in simple pity. Being used to the fevers that were rife among us, and strong enough always myself, I knew that I should be of use; but from that time I hardly left Jelfrey's tent. I sent away his servant, or partner, or whatever he called himself, and the Kaffers, to stay with my servant; for I could not bear that they should hear the frantic cries of the miserable dying man. It seemed, too, even from the very first, that he liked to have me with him.

His eyes would follow me eagerly about the tent, and he would call me, with the passionate fretfulness of a child, if he lost sight of me. But from the moment he heard my name, and I—in the vain attempt to soothe him—spoke of home and friends in England, this grew even more persistent. When he was conscious, his fear of my leaving him was like that of an infant terrified by the darkness. When delirious, he would spring from his mattress and hold me in a strong grip. In some moods he would *defy* me to leave him alone in torments. In others, he would appeal to me, sobbing in the utter weakness of his abject terror. But I never wished to leave him. All I wanted, both for him and for myself, my servants brought me to the tent-door; and my very anxiety kept me beside him, my great anxiety to tempt him to cry and pray—however far off he felt—for the mercy and compassion of his God."

"Lina," said Marjorie, softly, "you remember that other death-bed? How gladly Eustace Jelfrey then would have changed with his—victim."

"We can feel sure of that," replied Mr. Esdaile, gravely. "No greater agony did man ever witness than this sinner's agony of fear, on which, now and then, fell another agony, that of feeling what *might* have been. As I told you, from the very first he could not bear me to leave him, simply, I thought, from the fact of my being an Englishman like himself; but after he heard my name, he was still more unwilling to lose sight of me. He knew how my name was connected with his former life; and he knew my friends were among those he had injured. His only relief was in telling me of all this. It seemed as if he must speak of his crimes and faults to me, because he could not speak of them to his Judge. I saw there was hardly one act of his life which he could look back upon without horror, and I wondered skeptically (as I listened through those long, awful nights) why such power had been given to this man. Then I thought what he might have been, if these powers had been used for good. He would have been one to rise among men, and to build himself a name and reputation. As it was, I could only hear how every selfish plan of his had worked the end he wished, and could only think how much more heavily than upon the ignorant and unlearned the responsibility of all this guilt would lie. And this he knew as well as I did."

"Of course, he confessed that forgery to you, Mr. Esdaile?" questioned Marjorie.

"Yes; among other things, none of which I need tell you, except that he swam from that pool in the valley almost immediately after—his fall. He had known exactly what his position was when he began to fight, and how the mine lay, and he tempted his antagonist with a view to—to what afterward occurred. Though that had been no previously arranged plan, the temptation could not be resisted, and he felt he would leave the neighborhood himself, if by doing so he could insure the ruin of—your brother and yourself, Miss Athelston, though he did not speak of you by that name, but by one I knew well, and recognized. He found the valley deserted when he swam to shore, and he fled at once, making his escape cleverly, with the help of timely concealment and disguise, and leaving the foul stain of murder on the man he had wronged. After all these confessions, and those of the before-time and the after-time, came always the one request which he urged upon me. Would I undertake that the two thousand pounds which he had amassed by his skill and success (as we blindly speak of success), as well as his income of two hundred pounds a year, which he had not been able to claim since his reported murder, should be remitted to his son, of whom he knew literally nothing. So, after his death, I sent my solicitors an advertisement for the *Times*. When the answer to this was forwarded to me, and I found the name and address of Jelfrey's son were furnished me by my own brother-in-law, I determined to wait, and bring the acknowledgment and the news to him myself. So, Jesse—is not that your name, my little fellow?—you are, you see, the possessor of a fortune of your own, which I shall be glad to hand over, or invest, just as your grandmother advises. She is your guardian now, I hear."

"Granny, Colonel Stuart"—the child was looking from one to the other in pained bewilderment—"will it be right to take it? Would—would dad have told me to take it?"

Lina's head was drooped, and both hands went up to hide her eyes.

"Jet," said Neil, gently touching Lina's hands with one of his, and drawing the child to her with the other, "come and ask dad's sister. She will know."

But Marjorie, seeing that Lina could not look up to meet their eyes, answered for her.

"I think we may be glad that Eustace Jelfrey's money can do some good, as he never did any himself. And it will be clearing his memory just a little for us to use it. It will be," added the girl, jumping to pleasant conclusions in her own peculiar style, "it will be like doing him a good turn, and therefore exactly what Gerard Athelston would have done."

"At any rate, we shall be acting according to the request of a dying man," added Colonel Stuart, not quite seeing it as Marjorie did, yet knowing how wisely and honorably the father's property could be used for the neglected son, "and so I feel that we ought to do as Jelfrey asked—eh, Mrs. Cheere?"

"How prosperous Mr. Jelfrey must have been in all he undertook!" put in Mrs. Esdaile.

"Satan is a very remunerative fellow to serve," replied her husband. "He always pays well—in the present."

"How clever Mr. Jelfrey must have been!" mused Dorcas, recovering her breath slowly.

"What a different use he might have made of his talents!" said Neil, more thoughtfully than any one guessed.

"Isn't it true that there are no such dreary words in the world as 'it might have been?'"

No one answered Marjorie's half-whispered words, because they went too near the hearts of all who were there.

Later on in the evening, as Dorcas prepared to leave, Colonel Stuart detained her.

"We have a proposal to make to you, Mrs. Cheere," he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Esdaile are going to settle in our neighborhood, I'm delighted to say, and to send Jack to the Bleaborough grammar school. No boy could go to a better, as we all know, and as you yourself have often said when we have been talking over 'unattain-

able wishes.' Well, what do you think of sending Jet too? It is quite in your power now."

"I shall be very glad for the boys not to be separated," put in Mrs. Esdaile, kindly noticing how the words that Dorcas wanted to utter would not come from her shaking lips.

"I think it a famous plan," added Mr. Esdaile, seeing this also, and putting in his own cheering words to help her.

"How kind!" faltered Dorcas, presently. "Can you really, really consent for your boy to grow up with—his?"

"We think of him as Gerard's boy," said Mrs. Esdaile, gently, "and we really want you not to separate your little grandson from Jack."

"Sir Gerard Athelston himself would have been glad for them to grow up together," said Colonel Stuart, quietly.

Poor Dorcas! This last and most thoughtful proof of the good opinion of these friends who had so utterly forgiven and forgotten her complaining discontent, entirely broke down her self-reliance, and she could but let her tears have their own way.

"I can not help it," she moaned, apologetically, as Jet's caressing little hands drew down hers, and she looked up to meet Marjorie's bright eyes —"I can not help it, Miss Marjorie. I was thinking if my little girl could only see this prosperity come to her child, and know how good you all are to him, and to me, for his sake—or for the sake of him that was good to us both. I'm a weak and selfish old woman; I've been hard and ill-tempered all my life, but this makes me more of a child than—than my own grandchild."

"And don't you think your little girl *does* see your happiness, and her child's?" whispered Marjorie, softly. "I think so."

"Then you will consider our plan, will you?" asked Mr. Esdaile, wishing to cheer her again, "and we will discuss it further presently. I shall be all over the country for the next few days, looking for a house, so we shall be popping in to see you and arrange this."

"Colonel Stuart—please—Colonel Stuart—"

He had walked aside from the group to ring the bell for the brougham again; and Jet, who had followed him, was gently and modestly trying to win his sole and entire attention. "Colonel Stuart—may I ask you something, please?"

"A hundred things, my lad, if you have a hundred that want answering."

"Colonel Stuart, father didn't kill—Mr. Jelfrey at all, did he?"

"Not at all," was the colonel's emphatic answer, as he smiled to hear to whom the loving name was given and to whom the formal title.

"Then, Colonel Stuart, that—that promise, you know, about the monument, doesn't matter now?"

"No, dear," the colonel answered, pleased that the thought which had struck them all gladly, long before, had come so quickly to the child too.

"And—and, Colonel Stuart, is that money for me, for me to do what I like with, because—oh! Colonel Stuart, may I—I don't know how to say it—may I do for father what he did for my own mother?"

Clear and bright, the full meaning of the wish flashed into the heart of the listener, and he put his arm about the eager, trembling little speaker, with a sudden dimness even in his own brave eyes.

"You sh
whispered;
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SACRED TO
THE MEMORY AND CHERISHED MEMORY OF
GERARD DYMOCKE ATHELSTON,
OF HIGH ATHELSTON,
GERARD ATHELSTON,
AND MAGDALEN, HIS FIRST WIFE.
Died May 31st, 1871.
"HE THAT JUDGE IT ME IS THE LORD."

It wi lingered to the last upon the words; very air k Lina's drooping figure in his arms, beauty br r to his presence with a long and sitting in sunbeams y darling, there is no name in all our there was e that is, which we can be proud of as for over the i be of his. But I can hope *now* ed the foundat e others, some day, worthy to in- be a dainty arc Does it give you pain to read spoke to him of t this morrow was to l, looking up with a steadLina's—and not on l, dark eyes; "no, it was onel Stuart's and M seems to strengthen me brides were to go fro ed to strengthen me—magnificent and lavish mony were understood t ie, as she, too, and both. up and stood before Lady Athelston, and S to feel it will be here particular about this; know will be good for festival at the manor would Marjorie could take no part nswered, clasping Athelston's will had been in th his. "It will al- and (a great deal more astor g, as it does, the life ceeded in working it witho od report or evil."

In her delight at the m *ine is the Lord.*"
the heiress of High Ath y were all silent, in the had grown to love so we scheme for him grew i reading once more those tion; and, feeling so t e power of bringing Gerself, she determined on calm and trustful bravery, add to the happiness of ow-men. never been able to appr she had always been fo never learned to depend as she had so soon lea upon the gentle, grave g wife.

So the sumptuous an which she delighted to o ly for the two brides and brides.

Old Mr. Castillain cha this, reckoning how man him, yet thanklessly pron the old lady's." And t kindest and most generou reticence about having an save her fondness for Marj for Colonel Stuart. She ne noticed Louisa's cold, sarcas ior about these marriages. pleasantly that, on the streng she had determined to adop occasion, if she and Mr. Cast her. And, of course, Louisa, ward herself delightedly to the at High Athelston, knowing sh very handsomest among the twel

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and he would call me, with the pass the squire.
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only relief was in tel ' all a quiet person?"
ed as if he must speak s sweet spring evening was
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Judge. I saw there wa s of evergreens (blossom-
life which he could look th at the foot and sum-
ror, and I wondered sk gs waved all round the
through those long, awful ap-post midway; and
er had been given to this n one left until the mor-
what he might have been of spring flowers and
been used for good. He w pards passants on the
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the responsibility of all thi gers' children, who were
this he knew as well as I ning the progress of the
"Of course, he confess hop-keepers and private
Mr. Esdaile?" questioned ho were all inclined to
"Yes; among other e universal merry-mak-
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in the valley almost imp have substantial cause to
He had known exactly
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and he tempted his anto n through these few hours,
what afterward occurre bride, as honored and pet-
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neighborhood himself, still in the shadowy porch,
sure the ruin of—you e tender, sunlit green of the
Athelston, though h inking, in the stillness of his
that name, but by o he happiness which had been
nized. He found nd the deep and pure content
swam to shore, an rt shone in his eyes, and made
escape cleverly, w deed in their long, long, quiet
ment and disgui
murder on the r elston?"

The dream was broken by this greeting, as Colonel Stuart came round the porch from a side-path.

"Marjorie forbade me to go to Hawkedale to-day," he explained, as he leaned opposite Sir Neil, against the old stone porch. "She said she wished to spend her last day at home undisturbed; but she confessed that, as they drove to High Athelston, she should dismount here, if Louisa would allow her, and stop a few minutes to show Jet the monument. She promised him, so I know she will come. If to-morrow were her wedding-day a hundred times over, she would not forget her promise to a child."

"We hoped to see her at High Athelston earlier to-day," said Neil, smiling assent to the colonel's last words, "at least, I did. Lina was always sure she would wish to spend to-day at home. Now she will only arrive with Louisa among a host of other guests, not before yourself, I hope, Stuart."

"Thank you. But what a crowd of us yon are entertaining to-night! It is too bad, considering what High Athelston is going to do to-morrow."

"We like it," said Neil, genially. "You should see my mother's lively delight in the anticipation, and her indefatigable system of improvement in every thing. She never will, I am sure, leave off issuing improved editions of every order, until it is too late to issue an order at all; and does she not act her part well now—in spite of her sad deafness?"

"Wonderfully well," assented the colonel, with heartiness, "and she looks happy enough to make us all so. Her strength is steadily returning, I'm rejoiced to see."

"Worry always pulled her down," smiled Neil, "and ease has plucked her up—ease and Lina."

"Is Miss Athelston within?" asked the colonel, glancing at the closed church-door.

"Yes. I knew she would like to be alone when she first saw Gerard's monument. Even to myself, this morning, it was most sad, with its beauty and its associations; to her I knew it would be so—especially to-day. After to-day, Stuart, there will be no grief or sadness of hers—as there will be no joy, I trust—which may not be mine too."

"After to-day," echoed the colonel, with quiet gladness in his tone. "Neil, dear fellow, I can hardly believe it even yet."

"I can," answered Sir Neil, with a quick brilliance in his eyes. "And I catch myself pitying every one I meet, because he can not have my happiness. Fool, eh, Stuart?"

But the colonel was far enough from indorsing this, when he saw how the brightness of the young man's self-congratulation was not dimmed by one atom of self-pride.

At this moment the great Hawkedale britzska drove up to the gates, but apparently Miss Castillain did not relish the idea of waiting there, for the carriage drove on toward High Athelston, while Marjorie and little Jet walked together through the church-yard.

"I did obey you, Marjorie," began the colonel, taking her hand with a glad smile of greeting; "but I could not resist coming to meet you here."

"May Jet go in to Lina, Marjorie?" questioned Neil, softly, as they came into the cool, dim porch.

"She will like to show the monument to Gerard's boy, and we have all seen it."

Neil opened the door for the child, as he spoke; then they three waited together, Marjorie seating herself in a corner of the old seat.

Presently Jet came back to them, his step slower and softer even than usual, his eyes wet, and his lips twitching.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" he cried, his hands locked in Marjorie's lap, as he looked up into her face through his tears. "Oh, it's beautiful! and I'm so glad. I'm so glad it's beautiful—oh, father!"

The little shaking figure was clasped in Marjorie's arms, and the broken words were stayed with kisses.

"It is beautiful, dear, because it is like him."

When the suddenly renewed passion of grief was quieted, Jet raised his face again wistfully.

"Miss Marjorie, now may I tell granny to come? She does so want to come this evening—by herself, before she comes to-morrow, when the church will be so beautiful and full. May I tell her now?"

As the child left the porch, Neil entered the church alone, and, standing a moment just within the door, looked with eyes full of love and sympathy at the slight figure, leaning with its face hidden against the curtained rail of the great Athelston pew.

Then his glance rested upon the splendid monument above. Prominent even among the Athelstons was this one at which he gazed, while he walked slowly up the white-carpeted aisle. The exquisite marble figure of Gerard Athelston, life-like in its attitude and expression, was beautiful, just as he had been beautiful; though the marble might be whiter and colder than death, while to him had always belonged essentially the warmth of happiness and the healthful strength of manhood. Though chiseled only from a photograph, the figure was life-like in its resemblance, as well as exquisite in its easy grace and winning beauty. On the marble column beside it was engraved the simple inscription,

SACRED TO

THE LOVED AND CHERISHED MEMORY OF

SIR GERARD DYMOCKE ATHELSTON,

BARONET, OF HIGH ATHELSTON,

ONLY SON OF SIR GERARD ATHELSTON,

AND MAGDALEN, HIS FIRST WIFE.

Born September 19th, 1842: Died May 31st, 1871.

"HE THAT JUDGETH ME IS THE LORD."

Neil's eyes lingered to the last upon the words; then he took Lina's drooping figure in his arms, and woke her to his presence with a long and tender kiss.

"Lina, my darling, there is no name in all our line, long as that is, which we can be proud of as we must always be of his. But I can hope *now* that there may be others, some day, worthy to inherit it from him. Does it give you pain to read it, dearest?"

"No," she answered, looking up with a steadfast calm in her beautiful, dark eyes; "no, it was not pain. Looking there seems to strengthen me—almost as his words used to strengthen me—that is why I staid so long."

"Alick," whispered Marjorie, as she, too, and Colonel Stuart, came softly up and stood before the monument, "I am glad to feel it will be here to-morrow. To think of *him* will be good for me, even then."

"And for me, too," he answered, clasping tightly the hand that lay in his. "It will always be good for me, recalling, as it does, the life a man *may* lead through good report or evil."

"*He that judgeth me is the Lord.*"

For a few minutes they were all silent, in the holy silence of the place, reading once more those words which had had the power of bringing Gerard back, to meet, with calm and trustful bravery, the judgment of his fellow-men.

THE END.

AZALEA.

A Novel.

By CECIL CLAYTON,

AUTHOR OF "EFFIE'S GAME."

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE.
1877.

AZALEA.

CHAPTER I.

"BUT you subscribe to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel," said the Rev. John Purvies.

"Well, yes. Of course, I don't mean to drop *all* my old charities. But what has that to do with the matter?" asked Mr. Chiltern, in a cross tone of voice, which apparently showed that he knew perfectly well the connection implied, but was not much pleased with his friend for reminding him of it.

"Well, my dear Philip, I think if you take your niece in hand, and stop her from being brought up a Jewess, you might drop this subscription with an easy conscience. I see here a clear case for charity to begin at home. Why should you pay ten guineas a year for the chance of converting the heathen, when you can, by writing one line, insure there being another Christian in the world, besides bringing a pleasant piece of brightness into this old place."

"That's all very well when you put it in that way, John," answered Mr. Chiltern, still speaking testily. "But there are more things to think of than the girl's religion. Charity is one thing, but one's home is quite another. Fancy a child of twelve years old about the place, and becoming more and more in the way the older she grows! Besides, I always did hate Jews!" and the disgust in his voice culminated at this point.

"Then, prevent your own niece from growing up as one," was the reply.

"I wonder what Harold would say," mused Mr. Chiltern. "Of course, there's Harold to be thought of," he added, waking up eagerly once more. "It can not be right to settle any thing without his knowledge. This girl might be in his way when he is at home."

"Come, Chiltern, don't persuade yourself out of doing your duty with such fancies. There is a very clear case before you. Have your niece over to Dillon, and there will be another Christian in the world; leave her at Lugano, and there will be another Jew. Harold, boy as he is, could tell you what it is right to do, without a second thought."

The letter, which lay open before the two disputants, and which was the subject-matter of the dispute, was written on black-edged paper in a stiff hand. It was not from a lawyer, but had evidently been copied by a clerk. It had, in fact, passed through a lawyer's office, but only in order to be translated from Italian into English. We give it, that our readers may the better understand the foregoing conversation.

"Sorrengo, near Lugano, October 23d, 1844.

"RESPECTED SIR,—It is my sad duty to inform you of the death of my dear child, your sister, Mrs. Augustus Chiltern (*née* Rosario). She expired last week, and was interred on the 20th of this month. On the death of your brother, the late Mr. Augustus Chiltern, I gladly received my daughter and grandchild once more into my home, and while she lived the mother was the natural protectress of the infant. But now that this deplorable grief has befallen us, in the loss of my much loved child, it may be your pleasure, as the nearest relative of our little Azalea's father, to claim her. That the right to do so is yours, we do not deny; and you may be able in England to offer her advantages which we, in this secluded spot, can not. Should you decide to receive your niece, she shall at once be sent to England with a respectable companion; should you decline, I will gladly keep her. But, in this latter case, she will now be instructed in our ancient religion, of which, owing to her late father's wish, she is deplorably ignorant. The little Azalea speaks English. I am, respected sir, your humble servant, TADDEO ROSARIO."

The two friends re-read the letter.

"What a piece of composition!" sneered Mr. Chiltern, who by this time was thoroughly out of humor.

"Come, come! be fair, Philip. I wonder what sort of a letter you or I could write in Italian?"

"Why did he not write in Latin? Latin is the only real test of a man's education."

"Well, we never suspected poor Augustus's father-in-law of being highly cultured. You ought to be thankful that you have the chance of saving your niece from being brought up an illiterate Jewess."

And in the end Mr. Purvies had his way.

Though selfish, Mr. Chiltern was not altogether a bad man. Had it not been that Mr. Purvies was at hand to clearly point out his duty to him, he would most likely have found good reasons why Azalea should be left with friends she knew, and most likely loved. Still, the vicar's arguments were such that he had no better or higher ones of his own by which to confute them, and the latter therefore carried the day; and, for once in his life, Philip Chiltern was driven to do what he thoroughly disliked doing by some one who was not his son Harold.

Had Harold persuaded his father, Mr. Chiltern's yielding would have been simply natural, for around and within Dillon Grange it seemed to be only the course of nature, so long had it been the regular habit that all their little world should bow its will before Mr. Chiltern's, and that he should bow before that of his boy Harold.

Why and how this habit had arisen I can not say. It was not caused by wealth, nor by goodness, nor by learning—though for this last there was a great reputation. But here was John Purvies—who was undoubtedly the greater scholar of the two men, and who knew well that he was—and yet he bowed as low as his neighbors, and petted and humored his friend as much as any one. There were doubtless reasons at work in his case other than those which influenced the Miss Foleys at the cottage and the Rev. Richard Cox and his wife in the next parish. In order to explain them, we must go back some years—to the days when both were young.

Purvies and Chiltern were nearly the same age, and had been at school and college together. They had been fast friends from early youth, had lived in the same ideas, and in one mental and moral atmosphere—though in those days it was always Purvies who had given the ideas and made the atmosphere. It did not much matter at Oxford that Chiltern's face was one of almost faultless beauty, and that a certain though small estate was coming to him speedily: nor did it matter that Purvies had a rugged, plain, even ugly countenance—though with so bright and genial an expression as is not often seen—and had nothing certain in the future beyond a chance curacy of eighty pounds a year.

But when once Purvies induced his friend to come and stop with him for a few days at his father's old rectory—where every nerve was being strained to find the wherewithal to keep the young man at college, but where nevertheless pretty Cousin Laura was still welcome to a home—it mattered very much that Chiltern was a young god, and Purvies a rough-looking student.

In his simplicity he thought he had made Chiltern understand how his whole future was bound up in Laura, how he only longed for honors to share them with her, and for money in order to make her his wife. But I suppose he had failed to do so, for the result of Chiltern's first short visit to the rectory was a second and a longer one; the result of the second was a third; and when he left the last time, it was in a carriage drawn by a pair of grays, the church bells were ringing a merry wedding-peal, Laura was sitting by him, and John Purvies was watching them start, for some reason looking whiter and uglier than ever.

"How could I help it?" Laura had whispered to John as she said, "Good-bye." "No one can refuse him any thing."

She had, at any rate, understood all about it, though John thought he had been as cautious with her as he had been open with his friend, and had intended that she should never guess his love till there was a rectory home to which to take her. The living came quicker than could have been expected or hoped for.

The Rev. Philip Chiltern, incumbent and squire of Dillon, died a few months after our Philip's marriage with his friend's cousin. Chiltern succeeded his uncle as squire, and at once asked John Purvies to succeed to the vicarage of Dillon. He accepted, though his good luck seemed now to come like a mocking spirit. Had it all but happened a year ago! He tried to moralize about the apples of the Dead Sea; but when the dust is actually between your teeth, the feeling uppermost in the mind is generally how very nasty it is; and the avowed vanity of all human wishes is poor consolation.

John Purvies was a true, good, clever man, but there was a certain weakness in his nature which made the fact of Laura's nearness to him at Dillon a great additional attraction to the place. Had he been giving advice under the like circumstances to another, he would certainly have told any one consulting him to keep at a distance from his friends for some years, to act like a strong man, and live down his love far away. But, for himself, he lacked the moral strength necessary for a plunge into the icy waters of solitude; and without either Chiltern or Laura his life would have been very solitary. So he hovered round them, suffering keenly for some years from Laura's preference for his unconscious rival, but at last getting used to his position, and glad that he still was second in her affections, and not out in the cold altogether.

In these years, however, his mental attitude toward Chiltern changed. The latter was naturally first with Laura, and ought, therefore, in the eyes of Purvies, to be first with all; and thus, as time went on, the vicar came to bow as low before him as did all the rest of the little Dillon world. No one ever crossed Mr. Chiltern's will; and he soon came to doubt that any one could be in the right who did so.

This had all happened some five-and-twenty years before the arrival of the Jew's letter from Lugano. But, eighteen years before, another event had deepened and made still more tender Purvies's feeling for Chiltern. For some years his cousins had no child; but at last, one morning, a little round black head was lying on the pillow beside Laura's pale face. Poor Laura's face was, however, only seen for about a week after the advent of the little black head, and then her eyes were shut and her lips still forever. One word she had whispered when, all hope of saving her life being over, Purvies had come to wish her a last "good-bye:" "I leave them both to your care."

No wonder that, as years went by, the vicar bowed lower and lower before Chiltern, and lower still before his child Harold.

And few could be surprised at it in Harold's case. A finer youth no one could wish to see. It was difficult to understand how he had passed through his early years without being either spoiled or neglected; but here he was at eighteen years of age, fast growing toward the six feet he eventually reached, lithe and active as a young Greek, joyously though quietly bright; his head, where the black hair now clustered in thick short curls, well set on his shoulders; and though he never had any color—run, jump, or ride as he would—his dark-blue eyes hardly seemed to miss it, but shone as brightly as if his cheeks had been rose-colored. No wonder that he was his father's idol, and hardly less of one to Uncle John, as he styled his elderly cousin. The two seniors were never tired of watching him take fences, or win races against the whole village; and if he knocked over a hare or a pheasant (which he certainly had no right to knock over, and which, had poor Joe Tramp but touched, he would have suffered a month at the treadmill for so doing), it was only a good joke in the father's eyes, and but a mild offense in those of his uncle.

Nor was Harold only good at running and riding. He had mastered his Eton grammar early and easily, and was now making such fast progress in his studies that there seemed every likelihood of his realizing Mr. Chiltern's great ambition, namely, to see his son fully recognized as a great scholar, a real English gentleman, with true Conservative tastes in life and politics, and with a touch of Tractarianism in his religion. Low Church was vulgar, he thought, and next door to Dissent; old-fashioned High and Dry was prosaic and dull; but there was somewhat of the impossible and poetic about early Tractarianism which just suited Mr. Chiltern. We are writing of days gone by, before English Catholicism meant hard work in the dirty back streets of large towns; and when it was, if not said, yet partly understood, that Tractarianism was not for the masses. It approved itself to Mr. Chiltern's cast of mind to believe in a religion only suited to scholars and gentlemen. He was not altogether a bad man, as I have said, but was disposed to "hate every thing low."

There was but one difficulty in the way of Harold's playing the part in life which his father was anxious to assign to him: there was so very little money at his disposal.

When Chiltern had inherited Dillon Grange it was worth nine hundred pounds a year. Now, five-and-twenty years after, it was only worth six hundred pounds; and no one could find out in what way the capital of three hundred a year had disappeared: there was little to show for it but some beautifully bound books and a few very rare editions. The house stood much in need of repair, the furniture only just held together. Harold was in his last half at Eton, and any education which did not end at Oxford was, in his father's eyes, no education at all; yet Oxford was expensive. Money matters would have looked serious had Mr. Chiltern ever examined into them; but this he seldom did, and the result was their present state.

There was, nevertheless, a feeling in the back of his mind that all was not right; and, to crown his uneasiness, here, worse than all, was a threatened repeal of the Corn Laws, of course the natural result of the Reform Bill, but none the less an immoral attack on the incomes of honest men. Not that Mr. Chiltern's income would really suffer were the League to do its worst, for he did not own an acre which, in those days, was thought worth the plowing up and sowing for a wheat crop. Dillon lay far away in the Wiltshire downs, and the thousand acres of down-land which brought in six hundred pounds a year did little more than feed sheep, and here and there grow mangel-wurzel.

Nevertheless, the attack on the Corn Laws by the Manchester school *was* very diabolical—any one who pictures to himself an agricultural, even though not a corn-growing, village, thirty years ago, will easily understand how very diabolical, and will hear the echoes of Mr. Chiltern's angry, though never loud tone, as he prophesied the speedy ruin of the country with every farmer he chanced to meet.

And so matters stood when Mr. Chiltern

sent a short and stiff note, accepting the guardianship of his niece, to the Jew at Lugano—he and Purvies men of fifty, and both old for their years; Harold Chiltern thinking it was quite time he went to Oxford; and money becoming scarcer and scarcer at Dillon Grange.

All that need further be explained before Azalea's arrival is to account for her existence. This is a necessary explanation, for there are not many small Wiltshire squires who can boast of, or lament, so close a relationship to a young girl who is half Jewish, half Italian, and who lives at Lugano.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Chiltern had had one brother younger than himself, whose tastes in all respects were very different from those of the scholar-like Philip. While the elder brother was studying the classics, Augustus was scribbling caricatures; and while Philip was indulging his Tractarian tastes and dreams of a world that should be entirely composed of refined scholars, Augustus only longed for Italy and the old masters. He had but a very small fortune, and that he should earn his own bread was a necessity. Had he consented to take holy orders, the living of Dillon was at his disposal; but this he refused, to Purvies's gain. Then there was the army open to him, where, with an effort, he might have paid his way. This, however, suited him as little as the life of a clergyman. Philip never really pressed the army on him—it was too boisterous and loud a profession to please him; but he did press the taking of orders once. Not a second time, however; for Augustus all but swore at him and his proposal, and altogether swore that he would live by his brush, or not live at all.

So at two-and-twenty he was off to Italy, with a companion who was clever, and had a fair chance of living in the way in which Augustus was ambitious to live. He could boast of an income of one hundred and thirty pounds, and was furnished with a supply of colors which would have been equal to painting Tintoretto's largest picture. He disappeared to Venice, Florence, and Rome, and worked away zealously for many a winter, studying and copying the old masters. For a long time, though his labors did not bring him much bread, he contrived to live. His surroundings were not extravagant, his friends were struggling artists, and he, with his assured though small income, was by many among them looked upon as almost wealthy. If he was ever pressed for money, he had little hesitation in drawing on his small capital. Could he not easily replace any sum he might now require, when a blind world should at length recover its sight, and his genius be universally allowed?

After seven or eight years had passed away, and still Augustus could not triumph over Philip by saying that he was at length earning his living, the latter again ventured to beg him, even at this late hour, to come home, live with gentlemen, and obtain an income, which he still could do, would he but consent to take holy orders. Augustus returned but one answer to all such suggestions and entreaties: "'Life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.' I would rather enjoy life out here, with my blue sky, glimpses into the very heaven of art, and the good old fellows round me, than have the richest bishopric in England."

If you quoted a text to Mr. Chiltern, and he could not cap it with another, he was nearly always silenced. On this occasion he could find no passage, even with the help of a concordance, which distinctly said that it was wicked for a well-born English gentleman to turn Bohemian, live abroad with a wild set of art-students, and dine every day at the Caffè Greco. The Parable of the Prodigal Son passed through his mind; but that was hardly apposite enough for a *written* quotation.

Even worse, however, was to come. Augustus and his friends, though they usually lived in Rome in the winter, would disperse over the country when once the summer had set in. Some would go to the nearest mountains, while others would venture to the far-off Alps, though these latter always stopped on their southern slopes, seldom or never crossing them. Those who live in, and consequently love Italy with the passionate love she alone of lands seems able to inspire, are apt to feel that if they once cross her natural boundaries it may be difficult to repass them. The Fates have been more than kind to bring them to this paradise of Europe. Nature has put an all but impassable barrier in her mountain walls against their leaving her. Why, then, should they defy the Fates, and force Nature to let them pass? Doubtlessly Nature will yield at last, but the Fates are more powerful; and if rash mortals willingly leave the land to which they carry their favorite, all the waters of the Fountain of Trevi may be powerless to secure their return.

Augustus Chiltern had generally confined his summer rambles to the Apennines; but one year, after a season which for him had been successful, as he had sold one or two little pictures, and now had a few hundred lire in his pocket, he wandered farther, and hoped to spend the months of July and August on the Italian lakes. He made his way through Milan to Como, and thence, as a matter of course, passed on to that prettiest of spots, Lugano. It was the end of July before he reached it, and the days were very

hot. The nights were, however, cool enough for perfect enjoyment; and when the sun had set on the evening of their arrival, the two friends hired a boat, and went on the lake for a few hours' row.

Pulling was warm work, even though night had set in, and the moon alone lighted them—how beautifully, those who know an Italian moon on a summer's night will understand. So, after a while, they let the boat drift sleepily and dreamily, and were soon drawn within the big black shadow cast by Monte Salvatore across the water.

As they entered the shadow, another boat neared them, which was rowed slowly, very slowly, past them. Chiltern and his friend were in shadow, and unnoticed by any one of the three occupants of the passing boat. But when she had softly glided out of sight, Augustus started forward with a suddenness which endangered their own and the boat's safety, and exclaimed,

"By Jove, Tom, it's all up with me! Who can she be?"

There had been but one in the boat to whom these words could apply. Her two companions were an elderly man who sat by her, and a young man who was rowing. The moon was shining full on her face, and revealed such loveliness that Augustus's exclamation and subsequent conduct may be accounted for and excused.

A small Grecian and well-shaped head, around which were coiled many deep-colored auburn plaits; a low, broad forehead; large Oriental eyes; a small and almost faultless nose, and a mouth in which Augustus, artist as he was, would not have wished to change a curve. Such was the picture that met his view.

The figure sat reclining in the boat with the black lace veil of the country half covering her head and falling over her shoulders, while the pale light of the moon gave an almost marble whiteness to her complexion. Few men, let alone artists, could have seen such a vision fade from their sight without regret.

"Let us row after them, Tom," Augustus continued. "Now for a peasant bride, and a tie that will bind me to this country forever."

"Not much of the peasant there," answered Tom. "More likely some proud *marchesa*, who won't think much more of a struggling artist than if she were the real thing—an English marchioness."

"Well, I shall never have a chance of finding out who she is, if we do not follow quickly," replied the other.

They had not rowed far before the boat they were following pulled to a landing-place, near which was drawn up a carriage. In the moonlight it looked like a gentleman's, though clear sunshine would have disclosed it to be nothing but an old and shabby country vehicle. The three occupants of the boat entered it, drove off, and were soon out of sight.

"Confoundedly like a *marchesa!*" ejaculated Chiltern.

"Let us ask the boatman who they are," suggested Farrars; and they soon learned that the party consisted of the Jew Taddeo Rosario, his son and his daughter, who lived up at Sorrengo. "And if the signore wanted to know how they came there, or more about them," added the native, "he could not tell him. No one knew much about the Jews. Some said they had come from Naples long years ago; others thought they had been driven from Spain by the Inquisition. But, as a fact, the old father bought all the silk offered him for sale, and was very useful to the poor peasants of the neighborhood who grew it, and who thus found a market always ready and near at hand."

"Might have been better, and might have been worse," muttered Augustus. "Perhaps I could bank with the old father, and get into the house in that way."

"As you really have nearly three hundred lire left, you might open an account," laughed his friend.

Chiltern was often forgetful that, though "life and the body are more than meat and raiment," you can hardly open a banking account with either of the first-named.

Whether it was in the way of banking, or in the way of silk-trading, or by the means of simple, unbusiness-like friendship, that Augustus Chiltern succeeded in becoming acquainted with the Rosario household, matters but little now. Suffice it to say that, within a week of his moonlight vision on the lake, he had paid more than one visit to the white house up among the vines and chestnut-trees at Sorrengo, and was more than ever in love with the beautiful Annetta Rosario.

Of course, both the father and son speedily divined the object of the young Englishman's visits, and did not discourage him. It was difficult in those parts to find a husband for Annetta. No other Jewish family lived within a wide circle of miles, and the devout Catholics of Northern Italy were unlikely to present themselves as suitors, though the lady's beauty was undoubted, and her fortune was supposed to be considerable. Both men fancied they had secured a prize in the person of a real English gentleman, until they discovered how very poorly this *milor* was endowed. When this became known, they drew back, and would have shut their door on the poor artist, but it was too late. Augustus's handsome face had produced its effect, and Annetta was secured entirely to his side, and for his sake was ready to brave the anger of both father and brother. Generally quiet and docile,

when ordered to forget her penniless lover she broke out with stormy violence, the effect of which was that, although her father still was unwilling, the marriage was allowed to take place, only Annetta lost her dower.

Before October they were married, and back in Rome; and Augustus was hard at work with a sense of responsibility and a wish to earn money that were new to him. But, unfortunately, the mere wish did not bring the money; and, still more unfortunately, neither did the work. When July came round again, and the air of Rome was suffocating, so much money was owing and so little was in hand, that all idea of going to the hills had to be abandoned before it was seriously entertained.

This was of little moment to Annetta, who had been all her life accustomed to a hot climate, and whose white face could hardly grow paler; but to Augustus, who had spent his youth in the bracing air of the Wiltshire downs, it was very trying. Before the stifling August nights were over, he was struck down with fever; and it was soon apparent that he need think no further of a profession, nor of money and its cares, nor even of his beautiful Annetta. He was quickly in the profession for which we are all apprenticed to more or less skillful masters, where money was valueless and neither cares nor love could follow him, and was laid six feet deep under the cypresses of the English cemetery of Rome.

The broken-hearted Annetta sadly found her way back to Sorrengo, and a few months later the future inhabitant of Dillon Grange was born, and christened, or rather named, Azalea. She was so called after a head which her father had painted of his wife, with a bunch of white azaleas on her breast, and crowned with a wreath of the same beautiful flowers. Augustus himself settled that his child should be so called. He was capable of finding an original and taking name for his daughter, though he might never have been able to earn her bread.

Now we have done with Augustus and his Annetta. As has been already told, she lived till her child was twelve years old, and then left her to the care of either English or Jewish relations, as the future might show. The Rosarios would, as they had promised, keep her if necessary; but they were not altogether sorry that the answer to their letter proved to be a curt "Send her to England."

CHAPTER III.

Dillon Grange lay far away in a little hollow of the Wiltshire downs, sufficiently sheltered to allow a belt of trees to grow round it, though those on the south-west side had almost as great an inclination to the north-east as if the high winds that caught them had blown straight from the sea. They hardly blew with less force off the wide, unbroken moor-land down, which stretched away in all directions. Outside this belt of trees was the village—a house here and a house there, hardly more houses to the right than to the left of the gate. Then five minutes' walk from the entrance was the church, with its massive castellated tower outside, and its narrow Gothic arches within. Very large and lofty it was for a village church, as churches often are in that country; and altogether a fine building.

This church John Purvies loved almost as much as if it had been a human being. When he had an idle hour, he could spend it in no way that was to him so resting or pleasant as in wandering up and down its aisles, in gazing lovingly and admiringly on the beauty of the light arches which sprung so gracefully heavenward, and in vainly longing for money wherewith to fill its windows with pictured and many-colored glass, and its niches with saints, and to substitute some other means of seating his flock than the high pews which disfigured it. Things have rather improved of late; but if, some thirty years ago, your life had been cast in a Wiltshire village, or, indeed, in England at all, and you had much love for the beautiful in art, you ran the risk of suffering keenly from mental hunger. Mr. Purvies certainly did love with an artist's feeling all that was beautiful, and was fortunate in having this fine church to revel in.

Next to it, and overlooking the churchyard, in which not unfrequently a flock of sheep might be seen grazing among the big tombstones, was the tiny vicarage, where the vicar and his one maid-servant lived. The only other house in Dillon which was more than a laborer's cottage was just opposite the vicarage and facing the church. In a prosperous village, perhaps, this house would have been inhabited by a farm-bailiff; but Dillon was in most respects a poor place, and in this little white cottage lived the three Miss Foleys, who were undoubted ladies. The late vicar, being also the squire of Dillon, had lived at the Grange. He had been a more wealthy man than our friend Purvies, and had kept a curate, to whom he gave a small pittance and the use of the vicarage. After Mr. Foley the curate's death, the vicar had not replaced him, and his daughters for a few years had lived on unmolested in their old home. At length the incumbent himself died, and among other changes which had come over Dillon, one had been the removal of the Miss Foleys to the house over the way.

They were very poor, and the idea of moving far was out of the question. Rachel, the youngest, who was of an energetic and enterprising disposition, had, with all

the hardihood of eighteen, suggested that, as they were obliged to move, they might live just as cheaply, and perhaps a little more cheerfully, at Salisbury. Miss Jane and Miss Foley had, however, not encouraged the idea of thus lightly rushing into ills they knew not of; and though to Miss Rachel, at this time, the ills of Dillon appeared very grievous, she was too young to carry the day. Once established in the little white house, with an income of one hundred and twenty pounds a year, the reader will understand that any other move was not to be thought of.

They were now kind, elderly ladies, always dressed exactly alike, who could not, had they wished it, be vulgar, but who would have found it equally difficult to be interesting. They were in character of as decided a neutral tint as the drabs and grays of their dresses — Miss Rachel still the most energetic, but even her spark of life had been damped by the monotony of her existence; and all three were now rather mild and colorless — more than proportionately grateful if you lent them a book, or did them the smallest kindness.

More had been expected of Miss Rachel than of the other two, and in these days the three sisters were seldom mentioned by any in their small circle without an "I always did think Miss Rachel would have married" either beginning or ending the conversation. Who poor Miss Rachel was to have married it was hard to imagine. Beyond the original "Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," who was repeated over and over again in numberless varieties, and Mr. Purvies, whom the sisters thought rather "high" in his manners (poor John, the humblest of men!), no unmarried man ever came across them. This consideration may have been one cause of that suggestion as to Salisbury, though Miss Rachel was too "maidenly" to mention such a thought, and Miss Foley and Miss Jane were too much so for the thought even to have occurred to them. All three highly reverenced Mr. Chiltern: he lent them books, and was not altogether displeased by their obvious admiration and gentle flattery. They rather bored Mr. Purvies, however, to whom they were anxious at first to be very attentive, as to their parish clergyman, but, on failing to find much encouragement here, they willingly transferred all their admiration to his handsome friend. On no class of persons has masculine beauty a greater influence than on old maids; and, beside the vicar, Mr. Chiltern certainly looked an Apollo. Such a clever Apollo, too, as he was! "I have seen all his books," Miss Foley would say. "The library is a different room from what it was in his uncle's time." A handsome man who owns a good many books is likely to be as clever as he is good-looking.

Harold Chiltern the three ladies worshiped. When he was a child, they were never happier than when he was allowed to drink tea with them; and although those days were now over, the Miss Foleys were still deeply interested in all that concerned the youth. The arrival of one of his school-boy letters was an event in their quiet lives; and that Eton should win against the eleven of all England was an object of their ambition.

It was November before Azalea landed at Dover, in charge of an old Italian servant, who brought her to Dillon, and then vanished. Of course, the child was dressed in deep mourning, and even her Uncle Philip could find no excuse for saying she looked unrefined.

There had been some real interest felt by both Mr. Chiltern and the vicar, in spite of the apparent apathy of the former respecting this new inmate who would be so unlike any thing else at Dillon. Though he only half forgave her Jewish extraction, he could not be wholly indifferent to her who now alone could recall his only brother. And to Purvies the idea of having a young girl about the place, and in the house in which he spent almost more time than in his own, was very welcome. He was of so affectionate a disposition, that the more he had around him to love, the more love he seemed able to give to each and all. He would help her with her studies; Augustus had been bright and clever, if not studious; and Jews, whatever faults prejudice may ascribe to them, are not, at any rate, supposed to be stupid. He felt sure that he should not have an unpromising soil in which to sow his seeds of learning, and seven or eight years hence even Philip would be driven to bless the Fates which had sent his niece to them.

When she arrived at Dillon Grange, both her uncle and his friend were in the library, the only room that was comfortable, and had an inhabited look, in the house. It was, in fact, the only room in which, at that time of year, a fire was usually kept burning. There was, of course, a drawing-room, but it made one half shiver even to look in at the door. It was all enveloped in white — furniture, pictures, and carpet; very clean, certainly, but I doubt if any one had sat there since Laura had brightened it with her music, and sweet laugh, and gladsome presence. The dining-room was not quite so chilling as the drawing-room; but this room, even, was never used except when Harold was at home. When Mr. Chiltern was alone, he would have his meals brought to him on a tray in the library. Whether the dining-room was or was not to be used in Azalea's honor had not yet been mooted. The library, however, was a really comfortable room, low and long. The walls were lined with books

from the floor to the ceiling, and the books had been respectfully treated, and were mostly bound in a handsome and expensive manner.

There were three windows in the study, facing south, and looking upon a small green lawn, which was shut in with laurels and other evergreens; and although neither in summer nor in winter were there flowers to be seen, it was still a cheerful lookout.

The other side of the house, which gave on to the gravel drive, was dull and untidy; the road was overgrown with weeds, its sides were ragged and uncut, and looked uncared for. Mr. Chiltern's fortune was unequal to both binding his books and keeping up his garden; and it was consequently the latter that had suffered. Luckily, neither grounds nor garden was extensive; and as the property had never been valuable—indeed, in former years it was merely a younger son's inheritance which formed a portion of a larger estate—these had not been so laid out as to require many gardeners to tend them. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the walks ought to have been kept free from weeds, and in old time had been. But Dillon Grange, all but the library, was now neglected both inside and out.

While we have been describing the house, we have left Azalea Chiltern standing at the door of the library, where her uncle and Mr. Purvies were sitting. They had for some time been listening with anxious ears for the sound of the fly which would bring her from the nearest village that the coach passed. She stood a minute at the door before entering, and both men looked at her with interest. You must live quietly in the country in order to understand the excitement to which the arrival even of a child may give rise.

Mr. Chiltern's first feeling was one of relief, for his niece looked neither dark nor Jewish—at least, she was far removed from Mr. Chiltern's idea of the Jewish type of face.

He saw before him a slim, tall girl, with a very white complexion and large dark eyes, which met his own straight and fully, not boldly, but earnestly and truthfully—whatever the lips might say, those eyes would certainly never help them to tell a lie; a long full throat and a small head, round which were coiled plaits of deep-red hair, not auburn-brown, but rich, dark, decided chestnut; and small, well-shaped features. The face, indeed, was now too long, and wanted the fullness both of form and expression which years alone can give. The arms, too, were long out of all proportion, and gave promise of future great height. As we before said, though he failed to see any signs of her coming beauty, Mr. Chiltern's first feeling was one of relief, for no one would guess Azalea's Jewish blood from her appearance, and she looked perfectly lady-like.

Mr. Chiltern was not a man who could be easily harsh or ungracious: he welcomed his niece cordially, and was kind in his manner, as he asked how she had fared on her journey. She did not appear to be shy; she only looked very strange, as a tame deer might look if brought into a drawing-room by a master from whom it feared no hurt; not frightened, but surprised at the complete novelty of all its surroundings.

She answered her uncle's and Mr. Purvies's commonplace questions of travel—as to the state of the sea when she had crossed, and of the roads along which she had been driven—with few words, but in correct English. She spoke with a slight foreign accent—not a strong one, but it grated unpleasantly on her uncle's ear. After a few words, he was glad to hand her over to a servant, to be taken to her room, and then given something to eat.

Both men felt rather as if a pet animal had been sent them, and that they were at their wits' end to know how to dispose of it. After she had eaten her luncheon, what was to happen? Had she only been a pony, that could be put in a stall and left there!

"Now begin our difficulties, John," said Mr. Chiltern. "Will she come in here again after luncheon? And, now that we know exactly how she managed her journey, and that the sea was not rough, nor the road dusty, what are we to say to one another?"

Purvies smiled, and thought a moment.

"I will take her out for a walk, if you like," he suggested.

"There's a good fellow, pray do," returned the other, jumping at the proposal, and, as was not unusual with him, ready to transfer all trouble from his own to his friend's shoulders. "I shall consider her your *protégée*. I am sure she is only here in accordance with your advice."

"I have been thinking a good deal of her coming, and of what was to be done," said the vicar. "You see, she must be educated."

"You don't mean to say you want me to have a governess in the house!" exclaimed Mr. Chiltern, with horror.

"No—nothing quite so bad as that; I have a better plan in my head. There's Miss Jane Foley—she teaches the school-children capitally, and has quite a gift for teaching. If you were to ask her, I dare say she would undertake Azalea's education. If she consents, the child might spend the greater part of the day at the cottage, and then she might read to you in the evening. You will find the days go by very quickly."

"Well, that might do. The Miss Foleys are very civil and very poor, and might not be unwilling to oblige me," he mused. "You take the young lady out for a walk,

and I will step over and ask them about it. Miss Jane, you say?"

"Yes—she will be the best of the three. The children never obey Miss Foley, and Rachel Foley is apt to be sharp."

So Mr. Chiltern started to see his maiden neighbors, and Mr. Purvies went off in search of the new arrival.

He found her gazing dreamily out of the window in the dining-room, where, in her honor, a fire had been lighted.

"Would you like to come out with me, my dear?" he asked.

"Thank you," she answered; and they were soon walking together on the gravel path.

"Are you my uncle, sir?" she inquired, after they had walked a few yards. She had been introduced to both men at the same time, and was confused as to which of the two she was related to; and Azalea was never content till she had a clear idea of her surroundings. Her solitary life had made her dreamy; but her dream-land was not all mist. After all, more even of our sleeping dreams are startlingly clear than indistinct. Azalea had an earnest, truth-loving nature, loving also the definite, and not the vague; for, as she would argue even now, how could you really know if a thought were true, till you understood all about it? If it were enveloped in haze, the cloud might rise any day and show you a falsehood.

"No, my child," answered the vicar; "I am only your uncle's old friend; though your cousin, Harold, has never thought of me except as 'Uncle John.'"

Azalea looked bewildered. He was not her uncle, but he was her cousin's uncle.

"I will be 'Uncle John' to you too, my child," continued Mr. Purvies. "So, you see, you will be richer than you thought; you will have found two uncles at Dillon. Will that make up for all you left behind you in Italy?"

"At Lugano there were only my grandfather and Uncle Orlando," replied Azalea.

"And at Dillon there will be Uncle Philip and Uncle John and Cousin Harold," said Purvies, smiling to himself at the way she was apparently weighing the one place against the other before she gave an answer. She was evidently cautious, and would not rashly commit herself. He could not but remember she was half a Jewess, and that their prudence is proverbial.

By this time they had reached the church, the vicar's idol, and certainly the only thing worth looking at twice in Dillon.

"Will you come in and see the church?" he asked, glad to show its beauties to one to whom they were unknown, even though she was but a girl of twelve. "Have you ever been in a church, my child?" he asked, gently. Although, of course, he was used to hold discourse with English dissenters, the feeling which this half-Jewish, unbaptized Italian girl produced in him was quite different from any thing he had before felt.

"Yes, at Lugano I used often to sit for hours in the church at the bottom of the hill, while Uncle Orlando was at the market," she answered. "It was beautiful, and I liked sitting there in the cool."

"This church is beautiful too. Will you come in?"

They entered, and walked up the nave.

"Does it remind you of Lugano?" asked Mr. Purvies.

"Oh no! There is no picture. It was the picture that was so beautiful; it covered all the wall. It was the picture I used to look at all the time," answered Azalea, alluding to Luini's fresco.

The vicar thought of poor Augustus, and sighed. Then he made up his mind that Azalea would have an artist's soul and a Jew's mind.

"Not an uninteresting combination," he muttered to himself, "and, at any rate, an uncommon one at Dillon."

They walked up and down the nave, and the vicar bid her admire the beauty of the arches and the fine proportions of the building. She did not speak much, nor always give a child-like assenting "Yes," when told that any part was worthy of special attention. She looked at it steadily; and then either assented or did not reply. She would evidently never give an unthinking or untrue answer. She lighted up and became deeply interested over an old crusader's tomb, and here delighted Mr. Purvies by expressing a wish to learn a great deal about every thing.

"I had a book of English history, and the stories were so nice," she said. "I want to learn history, please. My mother said I should learn every thing when I came to England."

The vicar became interested in her as she spoke, and half regretted that he had sent Mr. Chiltern to the Miss Foleys. He began to think he should have found a pleasant interest in himself forming the girl's mind. "I will undertake the theology and religion, at any rate; that will be but natural," he thought to himself. "Perhaps I could hardly have found time for all; besides, it would bore poor Philip were she to be always in the house."

When they left the church, he took her on the downs, over which a grayish autumn mist was now settling. He himself had by this time learned to love the downs; but he had sufficient discrimination not to expect his companion, fresh from the luxurious beauty of North Italy, to admire them at first sight.

"They are bare, doubtless, Azalea," he said; "but you will, I hope, in time, learn to love these soft outlines."

"How can you know when it is summer here?" she asked.

He smiled.

"I think perhaps we feel it more than we see it. But look, there are a few trees down there; you see that more than half round the Grange there is almost a wood. We will go down and home now."

For they had climbed a slight hill which rose up straight behind the Grange. They went in, and Azalea was taken once more into the library, where her uncle was again seated at his writing-table, having already returned from his visit to the cottage. Azalea was given a book to read about the crusaders, that being the subject which, at the moment, was uppermost in her mind. Mr. Chiltern was pleased that she should have shown such an interest, and himself took down from a shelf a beautifully bound copy of the history and gave it her.

She curled herself up in one of the corners of the deep window-sill, to catch the last gleams of light of the fast-closing-in afternoon, and was soon deep in the study of her book. She looked quite in keeping with the old room, and would at the moment have made a pretty picture. Her pale face, surrounded with its red halo of hair, was backed by the dark oak of the window-frame, and her thoughtful countenance, the expression of which was grave almost beyond her years, seemed to match the scholar-like aspect of the room.

The men talked together, unheeded by Azalea, and themselves regardless of her presence; and the vicar learned that Miss Jane Foley had willingly consented to take charge of the new arrival for the whole of each morning, and had promised to teach her all that she herself knew.

"And I will do the rest," said Purvies.

"There's a good fellow!" replied Mr. Chiltern. "I shall be so very much obliged if you will."

CHAPTER IV.

Thus Azalea's day became mapped out. She spent the mornings at the cottage, learning the three R's; and in the afternoon she would wander about the garden or walk on the downs, either alone, or not unfrequently with the vicar. As the short winter afternoon drew in, she would sit alone in the dining-room with a book, for she never tired of reading; or Uncle John would give her a lesson in some of the paths of learning which lay beyond the Miss Foleys' power to impart. He had also to instruct her in the doctrines and principles of the Christian religion, so that the faith she was now for the first time to possess, should in her case be more than a mere name. This was not always easy for him to do; and the pupil sometimes puzzled the master by her questions. Azalea would not believe any truth until her mind had firmly grasped it; nor would she say that she believed it until she verily and indeed did so; and all that sinks so easily into the mind in infancy, and lies there happily unquestioned, had to be taught her when she had reached an age when truths are seldom received uncritically. Doubtless her faith would be all the more proof against attack in years to come; but it was now more difficult to implant. She was not captious, but much in earnest about every thing; and sometimes the vicar was in doubt as to how to answer her questions.

On one occasion he had been at some pains to go through the Church service with her, explaining the meaning of the different parts. Azalea had listened earnestly, and promised at once that she would remember it all, and never allow her prayers in church to degenerate into mere formalism. She had a really religious mind, and possessed much of that refinement of nature which seems to find so natural an outlet in Christian piety. On the following Sunday evening, as she knelt in the old Gothic building, she seemed to be pouring out her whole soul in the general confession. Next morning she came to the vicar, and, looking at him full in the face with her large earnest eyes, said, "And now, Uncle John, what must I do to-day? There must be a difference in my life after last night."

"Why, Azalea?" he asked, wonderingly, and, perhaps, with some of the feeling of keeping religion out of daily life which is to be found even in the best of men. After all, the line of thought which leads to putting different books on the table on Sunday is very common, though the act may belong to a by-gone generation. "What was there last night to change to-day?"

"Why, I promised you on Friday that I would really attend to my prayers, and say them with all my heart. I could not follow all, because I was so full of the confession. I really did feel that 'I have done those things which I ought not to have done, and left undone those things which I ought to have done;' and now I must not do so any more, must I?"

Mr. Purvies was puzzled; the child's life was innocent enough; how could she change it for the better? He replied somewhat vaguely about attending to her lessons, and saying her prayers, and pleasing her uncle.

"But I try to do all that now, Uncle John."

"Well, my child, try still more. But you need not in any way alter your life."

"Well," said Azalea, after a pause, "if people mean nothing by it, I don't think they ought to use such strong language."

"You will understand it better as you grow older, my dear," he answered. "I

have been more than five-and-twenty years at Dillon, and have not changed my way of living in any respect; and yet, God knows I never say the Confession without feeling that to me its words are real, and I hope without a wish that it may be less and less needed in my case. The Church puts the same words into all her children's lips, Azalea; and what, to a great sinner, might necessitate an entire change of life, in your case may need only a little more care in discharging duties wherein lies your only scope for pleasing God. You must trust the Church, my child, and not, at the first difficulty that strikes you, use hard words about strong language with no meaning. Were it not the best form of confessing our sins and imperfections to God, it would not be in the Prayer-book."

He was, nevertheless, pleased with the child in that she had taken the prayer so much to heart. Evidently she would not easily fall into a conventional and matter-of-course way of looking at things; and though her questioning turn of mind must be watched, it was better than a dull acquiescence in all that was told her.

The time passed monotonously enough for some weeks after Azalea arrived at Dillon; nothing broke the regularity of her daily routine. Beyond a chance call from a neighboring clergyman, there were no visitors at the Grange; and so far Azalea had seen no one outside the small circle of their own village.

Harold was to come home at Christmas, and Azalea soon found that she, as well as every one else at Dillon, was anxiously expecting his arrival. He was not to return to Eton, but at Easter was going up to Oxford; this would give him three months at home before his last educational move was made, and to these three months all looked forward with great delight.

He had not been at home many days before Azalea agreed with the rest of the world that Dillon was a very different place when Harold was at home. She felt the old library looked sunnier the moment he entered it, and, after respectfully greeting his father and uncle, turned and courteously shook hands with her, in a way that made her feel that, young as she was, she yet was some one of consequence in his eyes. Indulged as he had been, Harold never took liberties, and was as respectful to his father and his old uncle as if they had been the veriest of martinets, instead of the most indulgent of mentors. He had in him the making of a true English gentleman, and none of the vulgarity of a man who can be frightened into the manners of a gentleman, but who presumes as soon as all dread of offending is removed. If a youth can be much spoiled, and yet never forgets his manners, it is a sure sign of true gentility.

Azalea's life certainly now became livelier, and she, as much as Mr. Chiltern and Uncle John, brightened under the influence of Harold's sunshine. He was by no means inclined to let her be thrown into the background, and tried to induce even his father to pay her more attention.

"She is not really a child, father—or, at any rate, she is a very advanced one. I expect things come on at a great pace in Italy."

This showed some discernment, for Azalea at first did not talk much with him, and was reserved and undemonstrative. Yet, all her thoughts were certainly not childish.

There was a pony at Dillon which seldom did any work except when Harold was at home, but on whose back he would scour the country in all directions during the holidays. The pony lived in the fields for the greater part of the year; but a week or two before the holidays he was brought up to the stables, fed more generously, and to some slight extent groomed. Harold would then work him very hard for a while, after which the pony would be sent back to his field and rest till the next holidays. This Christmas, Harold had not been long at home before he insisted on mounting Azalea on his pony. Before he succeeded in doing so, he had to overcome more than one objection from his father.

"What is the good of teaching Azalea to ride?" said Mr. Chiltern, when Harold first started the subject. "In the first place, you can't, for there isn't a side-saddle in the whole parish."

"But there's one in the next," returned Harold. "I shall ride over to the Chase to-morrow, and get Richards to lend me Madge's old one. It's rotting in the harness-room, and we may as well have the use of it. If I find Azalea takes to riding, I mean her to go out on the pony every day, and I have something else in view for myself."

"What's that, my boy?" asked his father, who never took the slightest interest in any horse excepting the one or two which Harold had occasionally ridden.

"Well, Joseph Pearce's three-year-old ought now to be broken in. He will make a splendid horse in time, and I think Pearce will trust me to train him. If he will, I shall begin to-morrow, and very soon I shall be able to ride the colt while Azalea rides the pony."

"But what is the use of it all? Why should Azalea ride? There's the pony for you just the same as ever, if you would leave her alone."

"Yes; but I think she would enjoy it. Besides, it's much better fun having a girl to ride with. I have not cared half so much

for a scamper over the downs since Madge went away."

"You shall do as you like," replied Mr. Chiltern, as usual unequal to opposing his son's wishes. "But Azalea is very different from Madge, and I think she had much better stick to her books."

"Of course, father, I should not dream of comparing the two girls. Madge is very jolly, but I can see that Azalea is one in a thousand."

This was not exactly Mr. Chiltern's meaning; but he never argued with Harold, and let his remark pass unchallenged.

By the time Azalea could hold the reins herself, and sit the pony with ease while he went through all his paces, the Pearce colt was sufficiently trained to stand Harold's mounting him, and the cousins began to take long rides together over the downs. It was difficult to say which enjoyed them most. After a good gallop, Azalea would become almost animated, and Harold more chivalrous and beaming than ever.

Mr. Chiltern became reconciled to seeing Azalea always about the place, when he found that she undoubtedly added to Harold's home pleasures. The vicar was hardly so unreservedly pleased that it should be so. He was glad that Harold should have a companion; but still, in the last few weeks, he had become accustomed to having the little white face at his side in his afternoon walks, and now he missed it, and felt somewhat lonely.

As the weeks slipped by, the days lengthened, and the cousins took longer and longer rides together. In all directions they could find good cantering-ground, and in all but one the downs were unbroken for miles. In that direction, after riding for three or four miles over the turf, the downs seemed suddenly to end in a steep descent, and before you lay stretched a richly wooded and cultivated plain, which extended as far as the eye could reach, and made a fine distant view. Immediately below the spot from which Azalea first saw this view began a long avenue of lime-trees, which ended nearly a mile off, in front of a fine old Elizabethan house.

"There's Chiltern Chase, Azalea," said Harold, as they rode to the edge of the descent. "Thereby hangs a tale. It's the only pretty view in the neighborhood, and yet we have been riding about all these weeks before we have stumbled on it. Shall we make our way down, and have a canter in the park? Here, you must come round this way. You had better get off, and I will lead the horses down: it's awfully steep."

But being so steep, the descent was made all the shorter, and they were soon down among the trees in the park.

"I wish they were at home," continued Harold. "Madge Lifford is such a jolly girl. She would so much enjoy having you to ride with her, and I am sure you would like her."

"And she lives in that big house when she is here?" asked Azalea.

"Yes; she and Lady Margaret live there alone. Mr. Lifford died four or five years ago, and they two lived on here very quietly until Madge was sixteen; and then I suppose they thought she wanted polishing up a bit, so they carried her off to Paris and London, to finish her education before bringing her out. I wish they had let her alone. There's one comfort, they will never be able to polish her into a real fine lady; she's far too jolly."

"And is she clever?"

"Knows nothing, I should say, except how to draw horses and dogs. But she's great fun, and can manage the wildest horse that ever had to be broken in. She must have hard work before her, if she is to be a well-informed young lady before she comes out. However, she has plenty of good sense, and will see that she had better not go in for being a blue-stocking."

"What, not try to learn?" asked Azalea, rather horrified at the idea that the learning which just now so much engrossed her could in any case be dispensed with.

"Well, no; what's the good, if it's not your line? There's learning and caring very much for valuable books, that's one style; and there's jolliness and caring for horses and dogs, and that's another; and you seldom find the two go together. It's a great pity," continued Harold, musingly, "for I do want to go in for honors, and I don't want to be a bore."

"Oh, Harold, how can you? I am sure, even if you tried, you could never be a bore!" exclaimed Azalea. Indeed, he was never likely to be one to her, being as he was the brightest piece of human sunshine that had as yet crossed her young life.

"At any rate, Madge will never be one," answered Harold. "You know how much my father cares for learning, and yet he is devoted to Madge; and no one can make Uncle John laugh so much. It's a nice old place, isn't it?"

By this time they were in front of the fine old house; it was large and picturesque, with well-kept gardens and shrubberies on three sides. The sweep of the drive in which the avenue ended was on the fourth.

"And does it all belong to Madge?" inquired Azalea.

"Not yet; but it will in time. Madge is always saying that it's a horrid scrape to be born a woman, but I really don't see that it matters much to her."

"I don't mind a bit about being a girl," said Azalea; "and it certainly would be nice to have such a place as this all one's own. What did you mean, up on the downs, when you said there was a tale about the place?"

"Did you never hear of Chiltern Chase before?" returned Harold. "You were not likely to hear of it at Dillon; but did your mother never mention it to you in connection with our family?"

"I never heard of it till this morning. Why is it called Chiltern, when we live at Dillon?"

"That's just it; we oughtn't to be living at Dillon. If the world hadn't gone wrong with us, we should still be Chilterns of Chiltern; and if I have my way, some day we shall be back again there."

"Tell me all about it, Harold," replied Azalea, very much interested. "Do you mean to say my uncle ever lived at this beautiful place?"

"I believe my father was born there, and your father too. But, unfortunately, the place was not entailed; and when they were both children my grandfather had so mismanaged his affairs that he was obliged to sell the old place. Dillon was only a younger son's portion. Luckily for my father, his uncle never married, and so he came in for it; otherwise he would have been a poorer man even than he is."

"How wrong of our grandfather to ruin his children in that way! No wonder your father can not bear to talk about the place. I am not surprised I have never heard it mentioned. Is it possible he should ever recover it? You said something about getting back there some day."

"There is one way by which he possibly might. The next twenty years or so will decide if he ever can. I don't fancy my grandfather quite knew what he was doing when he let the Liffords get the Chase. Chilterns seem bad hands at mastering money matters. He knew his affairs were all in confusion, but he fancied ten years or so would set them all right again. I don't think he understood that he was parting with the place for good and all; he imagined that he was only making some new kind of mortgage to those which he had made before, which involved his giving up the use of the place. It was a curious kind of sale, for he stipulated that at any time during the next sixty years our family should have the power to buy back the place for the same sum as the Liffords gave for it. This, I fancy, he expected to be able to do ten or twenty years after parting with it; but, poor man, he died a couple of years later, and, as you know, hardly left more than five thousand pounds to be divided between his two boys."

"And now, if the next two-and-twenty years go by, and you haven't a very large sum of money, you can never again be Chiltern of Chiltern."

"No, never," answered Harold; and then he mused silently for a few minutes. "I suppose Mr. Lifford allowed that clause to be put into the sale because he felt so sure that by no possibility would any Chiltern ever own such a large sum as eighty thousand pounds," he continued. "I can't understand how my father can have been content to go on as he has all his life—cramped in every way by the want of money, and knowing, too, that money would give him back the place that has been in our family since the Plantagenets, and yet taking no steps to earn any. All I know is that it will be different with me."

"Why, what will you do, Harold?" asked Azalea, eagerly.

"Ah, that's tellings. I mean to do something; but I keep it all a secret yet awhile. I expect I shall have a fight, but I mean to win."

"Do tell me, dear Harold. I won't tell any one. Do tell me what you mean to do."

"Well, you mustn't say any thing about it; but I mean to make a fortune. Of course, I must take my degree first, because every gentleman ought to do that; but afterward I mean to be a rich man."

"That's just what you ought to be, Harold. My grandfather and Uncle Orlando were always making money—sometimes it was little, and then they were vexed—but it was always something."

"I don't think I shall go to work quite as they do," answered Harold, who, though for no consideration would he have hinted to Azalea that her mother's family were in any way amiss, did not quite like a comparison between his own vast commercial day-dreams and the petty traffic of a couple of Jewish silk-merchants. "No, I don't think I shall spend my life as they do. It would be too slow. I should be forty years of age before I had made ten thousand pounds. I mean to go to the diggings, or somewhere else where a very large fortune can be made in a very short time. Then I shall come home, get possession of Chiltern, and have some hunters, and every book I fancy, or that my father may want."

"How delightful that will be! How happy you will feel at being able to be of such use to your father! He was only last night telling Uncle John of a new edition of the Philippics which he was anxious to have, but could not afford. Will you let me stay on, Harold, when you all move down to Chiltern?"

"Of course, you little goose, you must stay. By that time you will be grown up, and will sit at the top of the table; and you shall have a real lady's horse, like one Madge used to ride—something much better than that poor old pony."

"But it's a dear pony," expostulated Azalea. "I don't think I shall ever want any thing better. I have never had so much pleasure as this spring since you began to take me out riding with you."

"Poor Azalea! Notwithstanding all its beauty, I don't think you seem to have had a very jolly time of it at Lugano."

"Of course, it wasn't so nice as riding about with you, Harold. Every body there was so grave; and, then, my grandfather's was not an interesting kind of seriousness. My uncles here don't make many jokes; but, then, when they are talking about their books and different matters that come up, I am always interested in listening and trying to understand; but when my grandfather and Uncle Orlando were talking their very gravest, it was only about the price of silk and that kind of thing, and I could not be interested, try as hard as I would."

"That, I know, will be a danger I shall have to guard against," said Harold. "Earning money seems to make people so fond of it that they can take interest in nothing else. I would almost sooner lose Chiltern than become so engrossed in money-making as to be indifferent to Homer. It will be difficult to keep my mind properly balanced, as, of course, I am not stupid enough to fancy I can make eighty thousand pounds without a great deal of hard work. With great luck and hard work, there is just a chance for me; but I shall have to put pretty nearly my whole heart and soul into pounds, shillings, and pence. One little corner I must keep back for all I shall learn at college."

"Your mind is so big, Harold!" said Azalea, admiringly. "I am sure you will always find room for all you want to put into it. You might drop your love of horses and coursing for a while, if you found yourself with too many interests. But we ought to be going home now. Uncle John says I am sure to be late for my reading, when I go out for a ride with you."

"All right. We haven't been half through the park yet; but we can come down here another day."

CHAPTER V.

When the April days were becoming warmer and pleasanter every hour, and Azalea was brightening more and more under Harold's genial influence, the Oxford vacation ended, and Harold left Dillon, to begin his university career.

Poor Azalea had to fall back on her uncles and the Miss Foleys for companionship, but she bore the dullness of her life very well. Hers had never been lively, and it seemed to her only natural that her normal state should not be so. When she had those around her who made her feel gay and cheerful, it was an unusual piece of good luck, but one that could not be counted on. So she was very grateful for the pleasure she had enjoyed when Harold was at home, but never expected to feel always as happy as she did while cantering over the downs with her cousin.

Our joys, like our griefs, are mostly comparative; and as to the prisoner, the mere relief from his manacles is a great gain, although he may still be far from obtaining his liberty; while the slightest restraint is oppressive to the perfectly free, so with Azalea. To most girls of her age and position, her ordinary life would have been very wearisome, and her cousin's visits only considered a rightful relief from so monotonous an existence: but Azalea reversed matters. Dull monotony was all she expected, and she was proportionately grateful for the brighter tone given to her life by Harold's society and affection.

He came home regularly each vacation, and each time that he came he was more and more deeply engrossed with his books. He was reading for honors, and he and Uncle John would sit for hours hard at work over the needful studies. They both thoroughly enjoyed the time so spent. Harold never did any thing by halves, and put so much earnestness and vigor into his study that he not only insured his success, but also added considerably to the pleasure he felt in his work.

To the vicar these days brought back his own youth, and he again felt all the delight of mastering difficult passages in Greek, and of discovering daylight through the most obscure of problems. It was a repetition of his own early days, with Harold in the place of his father; and though he never consciously compared the two, as a fact one of the reasons for his present great enjoyment was, that he had now for the first time as fellow-student one who, equally with himself, was averse from shirking difficulties, and who, though in knowledge his inferior, was his equal in eagerness to master every thing that came in his way. Mr. Chiltern, though enjoying the atmosphere of culture, had never had much taste for the harder part of study; while to his son and Mr. Purvies, the greater the difficulty, the more pleasure they had in trying to solve it.

Azalea delighted in sitting by the two students while they were thus engaged, drinking in with greedy ears all she could understand; and then, when she caught him alone, she would make Uncle John explain all that had been beyond her. She was not very quick at understanding things, but when once fully explained to her, they never again slipped her memory. Her education was an uncommon one. She had known but little when she came to England, and now, four years after, she was still ignorant of all girlish accomplishments and of much school-room learning; her geography was most imperfect, and her English spelling very defective. But, on the other hand, she knew a great deal of the classics, was far

advanced in Euclid, and would have been capable of discussing with a professor of divinity the various heresies which had torn the Church into its present tattered condition.

She had gradually come to spend a shorter and shorter portion of her time with Miss Jane Foley, and more and more with Mr. Purvies. The worthy old lady could not quite understand the girl, she was so very ignorant; and yet no one could call her really stupid. She had been more than once inclined to hand over the child entirely to the vicar, who evidently could do more with her; and, but for dear Mr. Chiltern's expressed wish, would have done so. Not that Azalea was lazy or troublesome in the way so many children are; but she had a tiresome knack of putting unanswerable questions to her teacher, and of making remarks which altogether disturbed Miss Jane's preconceived ideas of education.

It was in Azalea's early days of religious zeal that she most severely tried the Miss Foleys' patience. They were good, pious women, but imbued with conventional ideas concerning both religion and education, and these Azalea would sometimes rather abruptly disturb.

If a girl has to be taught geography, can you do fairer by her than to set the child to learn by heart the names of all the rivers in Asia? Poor Miss Jane was naturally angry one morning to find that, after having set Azalea this task one day, she had not by the next day even attempted to look at them.

"Oh, Miss Jane," she exclaimed, "I am sorry if you mind! But what can geography really matter?"

"Azalea," answered Miss Jane, with some severity in her voice, "I don't know what you can mean. If geography does not matter, why should arithmetic, or history, or any branch of education?"

"History is better; it's about men and women—God's creatures," said Azalea, who enjoyed the stories in history very much. "I should not be able to understand about the Church without history. But when you have once taken in the full meaning of the text Uncle John preached on last Sunday—'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'—how can any one care for those stupid names all about places in this world?"

"But, my dear," said Miss Jane, who was quite unequal to combat conscientious objections to geography, "you really require some knowledge of geography to understand even the Bible properly. Look here; among these names stands the Euphrates, which, as we all know, was one of the four rivers that flowed out of the Garden of Eden."

"Yes, I know that one is," replied Azalea, who, when arguing with Miss Jane, was disposed to be a little obstinate, and who, having started her theory, meant to stick to it; "but I shall never be able to save my soul by remembering all the rivers of Asia. I meant to learn them last night, and went out with the book; but the church was open, so I just went in a moment, and the organ began to play, and so I stopped—it was all so beautiful in the twilight; and then I began thinking about that text, and I could not help finding out that geography can really be no good. I believe," she continued, looking solemnly out of her large brown eyes—"I believe I am more likely to save my soul by looking up at those arches, and listening to the organ, than by attending to all the lesson-books in the world. I felt so good last night while listening and thinking in the twilight; and every thing was so still, except the grand roll of the chords."

Mr. Purvies allowed Azalea to ramble on in this way without checking her; but the Miss Foleys were oftener horrified at than pleased with her.

"If your goodness is not built on obedience, but on arches and organs, Azalea, I fear it will soon be found defective," said Miss Jane.

"The key-stone will be wanting," put in Miss Rachel, who was still the sharpest of the sisters.

And then, when Azalea left them, all three would agree that no sense or much right principle could be expected in a child who had spent her life abroad and been brought up by foreigners.

"She ought to be considered with every indulgence," would be Miss Foley's concluding remark.

"Up to a certain point," Miss Jane added.

"I am sure she always is," finished Miss Rachel.

After each of these little differences of opinion between pupil and mistress, Azalea would have a discussion with the vicar on the subject of dispute, and he would smooth things down, and so explain matters to her that she was willing for the time to do all the Miss Foleys wished; but they soon came to acknowledge that, as she was so strange, it was better that Azalea should be mostly with the vicar, who had more influence over her. He was nothing loath to have it so; the child was a great interest to him, and soon shared his heart with Harold. Indeed, after a year or so, Harold's visits were not without their drawback in the vicar's eyes; as then, every spare moment the cousins spent together, and the daily walk which during the rest of the year Azalea took with him, was solitary.

CHAPTER VI.

DURING the second Christmas which Harold spent at home after he went to Oxford, an event happened which caused no little excitement in the small world of Dillon. It related to Madge Lifford. She had been brought out in London the previous season, and since then nothing had been heard of her either by the Chilterns or by Mr. Purvies. She was equally the friend of all. But one December morning, the vicar, shortly after breakfast, walked over to the Grange in great haste, with a letter of more than common interest in his hand. It was from Madge, and ran as follows:

"DEAR, DEAR UNCLE JOHN"—(to her, too, Purvies assumed the character of uncle),—"You can be such a dear if you will! Do, *do* write to mother a long story about the wickedness of being mercenary. Oh, please do! You are my last chance, and mother always thinks so much of what you say. You always took her side, you know, though I am quite sure you like me best. But you must take my part this time, or I shall do something desperate. I had better, perhaps, tell you what it's all about, only, whatever it is, you *must* side with me. There's no use in mincing matters: I am dreadfully—past all curing—in love with Captain Elliot, of the Second Life-guards, and he's just as bad about me. Marry we must somehow, and somehow marry we shall, I know. But I do love mother, after all, and I don't want to be worse than I need, so you must make mother give way. Frank is as handsome as an angel would soon become if he were trained in the Life-guards, and had his figure attended to, and better than all the gold in the world. His only fault is that he has not got any gold; but what does that matter, when he is as good as gold himself? Oh, dear Uncle John, when I was confirmed, and promised you I would always be good, what I meant was that I would never be mercenary, or marry for any thing but love. You will help me now as you helped me then, and write to mother at once; please do, dear Uncle John. You can show this to them at the Grange, and perhaps Mr. Chiltern would write to mother too. Give my love to them both. I hear you have an Italian girl always with you now, but I won't have my nose put out of joint by any one. Please do your best for me with mother. Ever your affectionate MADGE."

This was the letter which Mr. Purvies read aloud to the three Chilterns, who were still together over the breakfast-table.

"The usual story already," said Mr. Chiltern, somewhat crossly. The idea of Madge marrying upset a half-formed scheme of his own. He was too lazy actually to plan a scheme; but an idea lay latent in his mind, which could not bear fruit if Madge married Captain Elliot.

"Poor Madge!" said Harold. "You may be quite sure Lady Margaret is right. Madge is a dear old girl, but she's always in the wrong."

"She is only nineteen," said Mr. Purvies, "so I shall write and tell her she must be patient, and wait till she is one-and-twenty, and then, if they are still of the same mind, I will do my best to help them with Lady Margaret. She won't even then have her fortune; but that wouldn't so much matter if she married with her guardian's consent. Madge would make a bad poor man's wife."

"That she certainly would," said Harold. "I can't imagine her without one or two thorough-bred horses, or having to be careful with her gloves and clothes."

Whatever may have been the vicar's advice, his letter produced no satisfactory result; for hardly more than a month after Madge's appeal, the inmates of the Grange were astonished and shocked to hear that all remonstrances had been in vain, and that Madge had eloped to Scotland with her Guardsman.

They had been married there and then. Captain Elliot had sold out, and, with the value of his commission in his pocket, they had both gone abroad till the matter should have blown over, and the friends on either side be ready to forgive them. It was to be hoped that Lady Margaret would be ready to give the young couple a home before all the money in hand was spent; for, that once gone, the handsome Frank did not know where to turn for a sixpence, and Madge's fortune was in the care of stern guardians, who, under the circumstances, were not likely to advance it to her until she was legally entitled to her property.

This elopement was the only exciting event that happened during the four years Harold was at Oxford. Of course, it had been one in which all were greatly interested, and although she did not know Madge, Azalea had entered very keenly into the rights and wrongs of the affair. She and Harold discussed it backward and forward, and up and down, in all its bearings. He was disposed to be very severe in his judgment of his old playmate.

"As if she could not have waited," he argued. "In less than two years she will be of age, and then she could have done as she liked respectably."

"Two years is a long time, Harold."

"No, it is not, if you really want a thing. I have no patience with impatient people. If I wish for a thing, I shall work away, hoping to gain it, as hard and perseveringly as I can; but I shall never try to take it before I ought. At least, I hope not.

Will you remember that, Azalea?" he added, with some earnestness.

"Of course, Harold, I know you will never do what you oughtn't to do," answered Azalea, who for some time past had subscribed to the Dillon creed, that Harold could do no wrong. She spoke quite simply, without having a thought of more than the literal meaning of the words that reached her ear.

Harold watched for half a second, and then, seeing it was so, muttered to himself: "Well, that is best, after all. It will be so much longer than two years with me."

Azalea was by this time sixteen, Harold over twenty. They have neither of them changed very much during the years that have passed since we first saw them riding together over the downs. Harold's tall figure has somewhat filled out, and there are a promising dark beard and mustache making their appearance on his chin and lip. But the gray-blue eyes are as merry as ever, and the open brow is equally unclouded by care. Azalea has grown considerably, but is as slight as she was at fourteen. Her face is rather fuller and more rounded, its oval being now all but perfect. Her complexion is still of waxy whiteness, but her brown eyes are now full of intelligence and knowledge, and have lost the vague look of unsatisfied yearning which they had when she first came to England.

The vicar's learning had evidently taken root, and was blooming out of those soft, speaking eyes. She did not look melancholy; indeed, why should she have done so? When Harold was at home, the girl's life was happy enough, and she never fancied there was a want in it. Mr. Chiltern did not molest her, and allowed her the run of his books; Mr. Purvies was always ready to talk to her, and to teach her any thing she wanted to learn; and Harold was her dearest friend. The cousins had not a thought apart—at least, Azalea had not one she did not share with Harold; and she loved him as dearly as if he had been her brother. Books and study and his letters were her great interest when Harold was at Oxford; when he was at Dillon his interests were simply hers—his college friends and college doings and future career.

The vicar would sometimes watch them half sadly. They reminded him of long-past days, his early youth, and Cousin Laura. He watched them, too, half fearingly. Harold was hardly in danger of suffering as he had suffered. Harold had a strong, vigorous will that was sure to carry all before it. Whoever suffered—and he sometimes trembled for Azalea, who was now very dear to him—at any rate, it would never be Harold.

He was thankful that, so far as he could see, no love warmer than friendship existed between the cousins. He observed them carefully, and decided that there was no danger. It was a cause of anxiety removed. Philip Chiltern would have been angry and vexed at such an attachment, and poor Philip must be spared all annoyance, at whatever cost to any one else—always excepting Harold. Fond as the vicar had now become of Azalea, he could not yet allow that she had any rights as compared with the husband and son of his lost Laura. But, luckily, so it seemed to him, the cousins were the best of friends, and nothing more; and when Harold married, Azalea would be a pleasant companion for his wife, and play the part of useful aunt to his children. He could not picture to himself Dillon without Azalea; no, she must always make it her home, and in some way be useful to Harold. He did not realize that she was very lovely. It was a pleasure indeed to him to look at her, but that must be because he was so fond of her. If asked what she was like, his answer as likely as not would have been "that she was a good, clever girl, but had red hair."

Thus two more years went by, and Harold had nearly finished with Oxford, and must decide on his future career. Up to this time, when questioned by his father touching the future, Harold had always answered that he must first take his degree, and then they would discuss the question. It was Mr. Chiltern's wish that he should take holy orders; then he could live on at Dillon in a quiet, studious, gentleman-like manner; help the vicar, and eventually step into his place. Although a poor living, Harold would be a richer man than his father, if he held it; and to be squire and parson in one suited Mr. Chiltern's views for his son.

But Harold never gave his father any encouragement to hope that he would, in this matter, comply with his wishes. He never entertained for an instant the idea of vegetating at Dillon on a few hundreds a year for the rest of his life; but he wished his father to remain in the dark as to his intentions until he should have taken his degree. He meant to leave the university with flying colors; and when his father was thoroughly pleased with him, then should come the battle. He knew that he should have to fight one before his father would consent to his trying to recover Chiltern Chase after so plebeian a fashion as by going into business.

He was very studious, very lucky in his examiners, and very successful in his examinations; and, when he left Oxford for good, he left it with high honors. He was great in classics, and not at all bad in mathematics. Mr. Chiltern was beside himself with pleasure and pride. That his son should have done so well at college was to him as great a source of delight as many fathers

would have found in their son's marrying an heiress, or being decorated with the Victoria Cross. On his arrival at home, he was treated even more than usually like a conquering hero. The very best port-wine was taken out of the cellar (where but little now remained), to play the part of fatted calf, and the three stay-at-homes burned every conceivable form of incense round the successful young man.

"And now for the future, my boy," said Mr. Chiltern, after dinner. "I can hardly make up my mind which is the best line for you to take. The ball is now at your feet. You might be a bishop, or edit the classics, or be master of a college, or do almost any thing."

"We will talk of the future in the morning," answered Harold, unwilling to dispel all his father's dreams of greatness for him on this the very evening on which he had learned of his success. "That will be business; we will keep to pleasure this evening. Azalea, do sing to us a little."

Azalea had a sweet, low, contralto voice, to which the vicar and Harold were never tired of listening. Mr. Chiltern did not care much for music; but, of course, when Harold was at home, Azalea might sing as long as he cared to listen. And so she began with hymns she had learned at church, and snatches of song she had caught up before leaving Lugano. Her *répertoire* was not large, for she had never learned a note, and did not possess a scrap of written music; but her ear was correct, her voice very sweet, and her audience not in the least critical. So her singing pleased them, and helped to enliven the evening.

"Now for the plunge," thought Harold, as he went into the library next morning, and sat down by his father, who was at his writing-table in the window. He began:

"Dear father, can you listen to me for a minute?"

When was Mr. Chiltern averse from listening to his son? He was all attention in a moment.

"Now I have done with Oxford, I have cracked one nut," continued Harold; "but there is another I must make an impression on before I shall be content. I must make my fortune."

Mr. Chiltern looked up blankly. In his eyes, the fortune of a man who had taken high honors, and whose head was full of knowledge and learning, was already made.

"You see, sir, we can't go on forever as we have been lately. We haven't enough money even to patch up this old house, which will soon be about our ears. We seem to have been growing poorer and poorer."

"What's the matter with the place?" said Mr. Chiltern, still at sea as to what was coming. "Who wants more money?"

"We all do, father. You are cramped for money at every turn; and so should I be, if I did not mean to earn some. I should never respect myself if I were content to rest on my oars, and to settle at Dillon at two-and-twenty."

"No, no," answered Mr. Chiltern, "I suppose not. You ought, I dare say, to travel. It will be difficult; but if you don't want to go too far, I dare say I can find the funds for a tour. I was never abroad myself, but, then, I married when I was your age; and I understand young men expect more in these days than they did in mine."

"Don't talk of finding the funds, my dear father. You have not, I think, understood me. Do you think it's a pleasure-trip I want?" And here Harold put some scorn into his voice. "It has been an effort to you to keep me at college so long, I know, and I never mean to touch another shilling of yours again."

"What are you driving at, Harold?" asked Mr. Chiltern, rather impatiently.

"Well, father, what I mean is that in a few months I shall be off to the colonies, and try to make my fortune."

"What, leave England, and go to the colonies like an Irish emigrant?" said Mr. Chiltern, slowly. "No, Harold, my boy, I don't think you can do that."

"I am afraid I must. I have thought over various schemes for making my way in the world, and it has always ended in my deciding that there is no chance for me in England. I did think of the Bar, but I fear that would be no good. It's such slow work; and, then, I don't know a single attorney."

"I am very glad you don't. What could have put such an idea into your head? Fancy being at the beck and call of every pettifogging attorney."

"I shouldn't mind that in the least; but I am afraid, as far as I am concerned, they would neither beck nor call."

"Well, that's lucky. I am glad you are spared the temptation of breaking my heart in that way," answered his father, smiling. "No Chiltern, as far as I can trace, has ever been any thing but priest, squire, or soldier, with here and there an idle scamp, like your poor uncle, who would never settle to any thing. I can't have you, my only boy, an exception."

"Ah, sir, the world has changed since the days of the old Chilterns. Others have got richer, and we have become poorer. It's no good hoping we can go on in the old way forever."

"I manage to do so."

"Yes, but I couldn't. You shall be the last of the grand old idle race, and I will be the first of the new trading Chilterns who, in time, will win back the Chase and all the old Chiltern property."

"Trading!" exclaimed Mr. Chiltern, with horror; "what do you mean, Harold? Why, you had better go off to Manchester or Liverpool at once," he added, sarcastically. "I believe errand-boys do sometimes become millionaires in those places."

"Yes, sir; but I can't trust to such luck as that," answered Harold, quietly. "I am not a rich enough man for England, where it seems little use trying to make a fortune unless you start with one as capital; but in Australia I might, perhaps, make my way."

"And disgrace your family." Mr. Chiltern was becoming really angry.

"Would you consider I disgraced you if, by my efforts, you were able to end your days at the Chase? I have eighteen years before me, and how can I spend them more worthily than in trying to reinstate you in the position you ought to hold? If I can some day pay the Liffords their eighty thousand pounds, you won't mind so much that it has been earned by trading."

"I have given up all hope of ever being back at the Chase since Madge married. I used to think that perhaps you and she might take a fancy to one another, and then the Chilterns might in that way again own the Chase. But that is past now; and for such an uncertain chance as making eighty thousand pounds in eighteen years, I can not give my consent to your lowering yourself by taking to business."

"My dear father, do try to understand me. I am a gentleman by birth, and, thanks to you, by education. I can never think that any thing I do, not in itself disgraceful, can undo that. If I were a rich upholsterer's son, it might be necessary to buy me a commission in the dragoons, to turn me into a gentleman; but as it is, there is nothing that can take my birth from me." And Harold held up his head: he was by no means without family pride of his own, though of a more enlightened kind than his father's. As Mr. Chiltern looked at his high-bred face and distinguished bearing, his anger for a moment was changed into fatherly pride.

"Well, my boy, then do nothing inconsistent with your birth."

"I don't think a voyage to Australia is inconsistent," answered Harold.

Mr. Chiltern persisted that it was, that he would never give his consent to the scheme, again got angry with Harold, and then the next moment was again proud of him. The latter quietly persevered. He hardly hoped to make his father agree with him in one morning's conversation; but he had now broken the ice, and must trust to time and familiarity with the idea to do the rest. It was now only June, and he meant to remain at home till the autumn; so he had some months before him in which he could persuade his father to give his consent, before he should be ready to act on it.

He had several reasons for wishing a little time to elapse before starting on his voyage of adventure. He wished to please his father by remaining with him for a while after his college career was over. His father had done all he could for him up to now, and he owed him at least this small return. Then he was anxious to earn the money necessary for his journey. He could not start penniless, and did not care to ask his father for money. He had from time to time made some small sums with his pen, which had been carefully set aside for the expenses of his voyage. This little nest-egg must be added to, and he would busy himself during the coming months with writing for periodicals. His college reputation made this the more easy to him, and served him as an introduction to reviews.

There were others too at Dillon from whom he did not wish to hurry the first day he found himself at liberty to enjoy their society. There was his dear old Uncle John, whom he might never see again; and Azalea —Azalea, who, he feared, now only felt for him the admiring love of a sister. He must stop awhile to deepen and strengthen her affection for him.

He would never, so he told himself, breathe a word that might in any way make her feel herself bound to him; his future was too uncertain to ask another to tie herself to him; but if, without words, he could rouse a feeling in her that would prevent her forming any bond which should make their eventual marriage impossible, he would be happy. He wished to bind her feelings so that she should no longer really be free, though he would not actually commit her in words. It was a subtle distinction, but one with which lovers who are not in a position to be engaged are not unfamiliar.

The cousins would often discuss the future and the chances of Mr. Chiltern's consent being extracted. Harold was always sure that his father would give in; Azalea was more doubtful.

"What shall you do, Harold, if he never consents?" she asked one day.

"Oh, he must in time."

"Yes; but if he doesn't. We ought to be prepared for every emergency; we ought to think what we shall do if he doesn't." They always identified their interests; it was always "we."

"Well, then, Azalea," answered Harold, "do you know, I am afraid I shall have to go without my father's leave, and against his wishes."

"Would you, really?" asked Azalea, surprised.

It was so contrary to the Dillon religion that Mr. Chiltern should be opposed; but, then, it was almost more so that Harold

should be thwarted. The situation was perplexing.

"I have thought very seriously about it, and have decided that I must go," returned Harold. "It's not as if the idea were one of yesterday. Don't you remember, I told you the very first winter we were together, that I meant to make my fortune as soon as I was old enough? I mean to do so now; and, somehow or other, I think I shall succeed, and that Chiltern will be ours again. So far, I always have won when I have really set my heart on a thing. I don't mean it conceitedly," he added, apologetically, "but, as a fact, I always have. With prizes at Eton, I always got what I tried for; and it has been the same with honors at Oxford."

"Of course, Harold, you can do every thing you try to do: no one was ever so clever," said Azalea, admiringly.

"It isn't that," went on Harold. "There are hundreds of cleverer fellows than I am who don't get on so well. I was born lucky; some men are born the other way: and it would be a shame, even at the risk of displeasing my father, if I did nothing with my luck."

"But, Harold," persisted Azalea, "it must be because you are so clever. You couldn't have got your high honors by luck."

"Not exactly by luck. But I tell you what it is, Azalea: it is a piece of the very best luck to have the sort of instinct I have, of what I can and what I can not do. I see so many fellows, who I know are better men than myself, come to grief on that rock—the want of knowledge of what they can and what they can't do. They go about, losing their way in the dark, and nothing comes of it. I feel half ashamed of myself when I pass them, only because I have kept straight on my own way, though very often on a lower level altogether."

"And you have this kind of instinct that you will succeed at the diggings?"

"I think I have—either at the diggings or in some such place, as long as it's the other side of the world. But I know I shall never make a fortune by any thing I can do in England. Of course, it would be pleasanter to stop at home and try the Bar; of course, the dream of being attorney-general is more to my taste than the idea of being a cattle-driver on a huge scale, only I have sense enough to see I may perhaps be the one, but that I can't be the other. It's no use jumping so high that you fall down to the earth again. A steady climb I may succeed in."

"But, Harold, you are likely to shoot higher if you aim at the moon than if you only aim at the top of the house."

"Yes; but each sphere has its own moon. I shall aim at the moon belonging to the sphere I choose."

"But you must be clever enough to get on at the Bar, I am sure you must."

"No, dear, I am not. If my father had been a lawyer before me, I might perhaps have done passably well. But without the help of a single attorney, I am sure I should never get on. And I look on it as a piece of luck that at my age I should be able to understand that it is so, and should choose the less attractive path that may lead to something. I am not going to try for too much, so I shall hope to get what I try for."

"I *do* hope you may, Harold. It will be very hard if you exile yourself and displease my uncle all in vain," said Azalea. "I wish," she added, rather sadly—"I wish you could have made your fortune and stopped in England too. The years will be very blank when I have not your holidays to look forward to."

"Dear Azalea, will they?" said Harold, looking at her earnestly, and laying his hand on her arm for a moment.

He was usually very undemonstrative with Azalea, and allowed himself none of those little cousinly familiarities which would have been natural in their position. As he wished Azalea to remain in ignorance as to his feelings, he could better exercise self-control by behaving in a uniformly friendly but cold manner.

He let his hand rest for a few instants on her arm, she looking at him with a sweet, sad smile. She did not understand herself, but she felt somehow very near to him at that moment.

"Indeed they will," she answered, after a short pause. "I don't know what I shall have to look forward to, except your one grand coming-back for good. But at first that will be such a long way off, it will hardly do to think much about it."

"It's best as it is," said Harold. "It is really best I should go."

"Don't suppose that I doubt it," said Azalea, more cheerfully. Her ideas and thoughts were so entirely at one with her cousin's, that she was not likely now to differ from him. "I mean to do my best to prevent my uncle missing you too much. I think he begins really to like my reading to him; and then there will be Uncle John to look after me; and I shall look after him too," she added; "for I am quite old enough to take care of people."

"And there will be the Miss Foleys for companions," returned Harold.

Her estimate of these ladies was the only point in which Azalea differed from Harold. She had ceased for some time past to have lessons at the cottage; but they and Azalea did not get on much better as friends than they had done in early years as teachers and pupil. They were not interesting to Azalea, nor did they care for her. To Harold, whom they had worshiped since the day of

his birth, they naturally appeared more attractive.

"Never mind the Miss Foleys," she answered. "There will be three of us to talk about you and your letters all day long, and that ought to satisfy you. It's lucky we all three have the same interest, isn't it, Harold? We shall never be tired of one another's talk."

And yet he was not spoiled!

CHAPTER VII.

One evening, when his father and uncle were pacing the lawn together, Harold, who had just returned from a ride, came hurriedly toward them, and said,

"Father, I have just heard very bad news about Madge."

"What is it, my boy? Are she and her husband bankrupt?"

"Worse than that; though perhaps that may have befallen the luckless pair as well. But a month ago Madge quarreled altogether with her husband, left him, and came back to her mother."

"Poor Lady Margaret! And is she to take charge of her for the rest of her life?"

"I don't know about that. But I have not told all. A very short time after she left him, Captain Elliot caught a fever in Paris. Madge was sent for at the end, but arrived just too late to see him alive. Now she is a widow, and must be suffering from rather an unquiet conscience, I am afraid. First to have left her mother, and then her husband! Poor Madge! she can hardly be happy again all her life."

"I dare say she is wretched enough now, but I think she will recover in time. Her nature is so very elastic," said the vicar. "Where did you hear all this, Harold?"

"I have just been over to the Chase," replied Harold, "and I saw Richards. They were very busy there till yesterday getting the place ready. Lady Margaret had written to say that she and Madge would be there shortly, and spend the winter at Chiltern. Madge's maid is Richards's daughter, and she had written to her father, explaining why they were coming to be quiet here. This was before they knew any thing of Captain Elliot's illness. This morning Richards heard again, and Lady Margaret announced his death, and said they now meant to remain abroad for a time, and the house might continue shut up."

"So poor Madge is a widow," said Mr. Chiltern. "How old is she, Harold?"

"About two-and-twenty, I suppose. She was not to be allowed to touch her fortune till she was five-and-twenty, so that I fear she and her husband must have been very poor. Mr. Lifford would have tied it up for longer, don't you remember, uncle, if you had not dissuaded him."

"Yes, I remember. He liked to fancy Madge's fortune rolling up till it became an enormous sum. It was quite big enough for any woman when he died. By the time she is five-and-twenty, I should say it would be fifty thousand pounds."

"I wish they were coming to the Chase at once," said Harold. "I should have liked to have said 'good-bye' to Madge before starting."

"I wish they were," said his father.

He was thinking that, as Madge was once more free, he might again indulge his wish to see her Harold's wife. A widow who had deserted her first husband was not quite so desirable a daughter-in-law as Madge would have been some years ago; still, a marriage with her would be a certain and easy way both to regain the Chase and to keep his son at home. He could hardly explain this to Harold; indeed, even in his own mind, he shrunk from the idea that he wished his son to marry for money; only, if he happened to fall in love with an heiress so conveniently at hand, why, it would be very pleasant to be back at the Chase.

Harold now always talked of his leaving home as a settled thing, although his father had never formally given his consent. But Mr. Chiltern felt that he was not strong enough to oppose Harold when he was really in earnest. If Harold did not yield, he knew that he must. He loved and believed in his son far too much to quarrel with him. He was not, however, happy during these weeks. He had not ostensibly given in, and therefore could not talk over the plans and future prospects of his son; but he had practically done so to a sufficient extent to make him feel sure that plans were being made, the details of which were unknown to him. At length all suspense was at an end. Harold one day told his father that he was about to write and engage a place in a steamer which started in the following November.

"I can't do it, father, without telling you what I am about. Twenty years hence you will be thankful for what I am doing now."

"Twenty years hence it won't, I think, much matter to me, my boy," said Mr. Chiltern, sorrowfully. "I am fast becoming an old man, and you are now giving me the bitterest disappointment of my life. However, it's the first and only thing you have ever done that was not a pride and pleasure to me, so we will say no more about it. When our accounts are wound up, I shall still be your debtor. You have done more for my happiness than I have been able to do for yours."

"Don't talk so, please," said Harold, touched, but not wavering. "You have been the best of fathers to me, and I want

to be a good son. Surely, it will be something if I can set up the family again and recover Chiltern?"

"I can't look so far ahead as you, Harold; and for the present, I can not say I like your going into business. But we won't talk of it any more," said Mr. Chiltern, really glad to have made his final protest. "So you have quite made up your mind to start in November?"

For a man who had been so little thwarted all his life, Mr. Chiltern gave in with a fairly good grace, and to no one but Harold would he have been equally yielding. Since his son must have his way, he was glad that all reserve should be broken down between them, and that there was now no subject which they need avoid in conversation. He could not throw much fervor into his interest in Harold's preparations, but he was glad to know what was going on.

"Yes, father," answered Harold. "I am writing for a berth in the P. and O. steamer which starts on the 4th of November. That will take me as far as Ceylon, and there I shall decide further where I am to go. I have not quite settled on Australia, but I fancy I shall find myself there. It may seem rather wild to start, in this way, without knowing where I am going; but, once on board ship, I shall be thrown with more men who can help me with advice than I shall be likely to meet in a year at home."

This was spoken near the end of September, and the last few weeks passed very quickly. The berries on the thorn-bushes had ripened; the leaves had yellowed, and every day, when the autumn wind whistled through the trees, fell in golden showers all around; the swallows had flown; even the blackberries no longer glistened in the hedgerows. These were doubly melancholy signs to all at Dillon, who were longing to defer the parting yet awhile.

Harold was to leave very early on the morning of the fourth for Southampton; and now the Saints had been honored, the Dead remembered, and the dreaded last day, the third, was wearing away its hours.

It was a dark, drizzling day. A soft west wind was blowing, which prevented its being cold, but not high enough to disperse the damp mist which hung around every thing out-of-doors. In the house things were not more cheerful. Mr. Chiltern was very low, and the vicar almost equally so, and Azalea, half frightened that, after all, Harold must be in the wrong to make them both so unhappy, felt within herself a fullness at her heart and a choking sensation in her throat which were new to her. She was accustomed to be dull, but not to be unhappy; and she now told herself that she was selfishly miserable because Harold was to have the opening in the world that he longed for.

She was generally quiet and calm, and could contentedly stay in one place and over one occupation for hours together; but this afternoon she wandered up and down stairs and changed her book a dozen times. She could settle to nothing, though she hardly understood why. At length, throwing down in despair the last book she had taken up, she put on her hat and shawl, and thought she would try and quiet herself by a walk over the downs. She had not been in the library for some hours, thinking that she had better allow father and son to spend their last afternoon together; but at the foot of the stairs she met Harold.

"What, going out this afternoon, Azalea?" he asked. "I thought it was too wet for you."

"Oh, the rain is nothing; it is only damp."

"I have just been to the cottage, where I began my leave-takings by saying good-bye to the Miss Foleys; and I was coming to be brightened up again by a little talk with you. We will have a last walk together."

He put on his hat, and they went out, turned round by the back of the house, and up a steep bank, by which means they got at once on to the downs, without passing through the village.

The mist and drizzle prevented their seeing many yards in front of them, and to a stranger it might have been a dangerous experiment to take a walk on such an afternoon over the moor-land downs, where the only landmarks were an occasional hawthorn-bush or a chalk-pit. But Harold knew every rise and fall in the land, every shepherd's hut, every bit of bramble, for miles round; and there was no fear, go where he might, that he would be unable to retrace his steps.

The gloomy mistiness of the afternoon was not unpleasant to either of the cousins; it seemed, even out on the open plain, to shut them in together and draw them nearer to one another. Bright sunshine and clear skies, against which every thing stands out in definite relief, bring with them a feeling of independence and clear-sightedness; but they are apt to destroy the sentiment fostered by hazy mists: and we are generally more interested in that of which we can only catch the wavering outline than in that of which we can examine every detail. The shadowy indistinctness of a forest of Gothic arches will be more suggestive to a poetical mind than the clear outline of a Greek temple; the second part of "Faust" than a tragedy of Racine's.

And this outer mist on the downs harmonized well with Harold's and Azalea's feeling of undefined relation to one another. They both knew that they felt more than cousinly love, but no word defining how much stronger was their feeling had as yet passed between them. Acknowledged lovers

may delight in both actual and figurative sunshine, to lighten every corner of their hearts to one another, as the sun will disclose every crevice of an old building; but round Harold and his known secret there hung a mist which he thought he was not anxious Azalea should penetrate, and round Azalea and her unknown secret a still thicker cloud, so thick a one that neither of them suspected that it concealed any thing, or that there was any thing to conceal. So the misty afternoon and the wide downs harmonized well with both their inner selves; with their boundless possibility of love, concealed by their ignorance of its power.

Even Harold did not yet know the strength of his love. How should he, when he was only three-and-twenty? Love, like all strong passions, requires time to develop fully, and rarely starts into existence, Minerva-like, at an early age. If those gentle shepherds and shepherdesses who are "so fond of one another" in China are ever allowed to marry, what a doubtfully happy existence must be theirs by the time the youth has grown a beard, and life has put a little expression into the maiden's face!

Azalea, though nearly eighteen, was not old in her feelings. Her character, like her *physique*, was of the slow-growing, grand type, and the full capabilities of her nature were not likely to be developed till later. In every way she grew slowly, and had you tried to force her character and talents, you would not have succeeded in bringing them to perfection a day sooner than nature had intended. You might by so trying perhaps have succeeded in spoiling her, but you could hardly have prematurely forced her. Luckily, at Dillon no one was likely to attempt it. Indeed, had it not been for Harold and the vicar, she would have been in danger of vegetating.

I wonder if the reader can see Azalea walking across the downs as distinctly as I can, her firm, bold, light step keeping pace quite easily with Harold's quick one. She was always dressed very plainly, in some rough, black, serge-like material, but her beauty was not of the kind that required "pretty clothes" to set it off. A plain plaid shawl was pinned closely round her long, column-like throat, and as soon as she was well out on the downs, her hat was off and hanging on her arm. Her hair had lately become very much darker, and though when the sun was shining on it, the gold would glisten as brightly as ever, on a dull afternoon like this one, the rich color would seem to be hidden away in the thick coils, like a smoldering fire, which throws a glow over every thing near, although not actually seen. It was parted simply on her broad though not high forehead, and wound round and round behind. Her skin was very white; not even an English winter, nor the soft west wind blowing over the downs, gave her any color. The long, oval eyes looked at you quietly and truthfully; they never sparkled: but when another's would have sparkled, her eyes grew softer and softer, and when she smiled or laughed, they were softest of all. Her nose and upper lip were all but perfect in their Grecian beauty; the line of the former was slightly higher at the point than between the eyes, and the nostrils were arched like those of a Venus. It was here that Azalea's face was most impressive; when eager or excited, the thin, transparent nostril would swell and dilate, and be full of expression, and her lips would part as if a burst of eloquence were about to fall from them. Her cheeks were still rather too thin, but when time had rounded them a little, her beauty would be faultless.

"My last remembrances of Dillon will be characteristic ones," said Harold. "A gray, misty afternoon, and a long walk over the downs with you, Azalea. I wonder when I shall see this picture again!"

He stopped and looked around him, and at his cousin in the foreground.

"I wonder when you will, Harold. Somehow, this afternoon, I can't help having my doubts as to its being right for you to go. Before to-day I always felt so certain that you could not be wrong."

"It is the same with me," answered Harold. "But I suppose it is inevitable that when a man, as it were, forces his own way, sooner or later there must come a dissatisfied doubt as to his being in the right. With me the doubt seems to have come on the eve of my having my wish gratified. Having my own way is not nearly so pleasant as I used to think it would be, and to-day I would rather be my father than myself."

"But you do not seriously repent, do you, Harold?"

"I suppose I don't. But this afternoon I *know* I am right, a great deal more strongly than I *feel* that I am. I have to go over the arguments and prove it to myself every hour, in a way which looks as if there were real doubts at the bottom of my heart."

"Uncle John thinks you are right," said Azalea.

"Yes, that's a comfort; he has more sense than the whole of Dillon put together. You must take care of him, Azalea, and of my father too; they are both growing old men. It makes a great difference to me leaving you here."

"I don't think I am much to your father," answered Azalea. "I am a great deal more of a companion to Uncle John."

"My father is more used to be himself thought of than to think of others," said Harold, quite simply, as a fact, but not one

meriting blame. It never occurred to him that his words accused his father of selfishness. "But I know better than he does himself how much he would miss you. I suspect your going away would leave a worse hole in his life than mine will."

"Oh, Harold, what an idea! Uncle John likes to have me with him; but I don't think your father even knows whether or not I am in the room, except when I am reading to him."

"You may think he doesn't; but I am sure he would soon feel the want if you were never at hand to find out passages for him, and to do all he asks of you. He won't really miss me much. For the last twelve years I have not been much at home, except for a few weeks at a time; but you have been always here, and have grown into his life."

"Well, then, it's lucky that I am hardly likely to go away," said Azalea, with a smile.

"Do you never dream of going away, Azalea?" asked Harold, rather gravely.

"Going away from Dillon," she said, with surprise. "Why, where should I go?"

"You might marry, you know," he answered, looking straight before him, fixedly. It was a dangerous subject that he broached, but he could not avoid it altogether; this last afternoon he was growing almost reckless.

Azalea burst into a laugh. "Marry, Harold! Why, who is there to marry in these parts?"

"You are not chained to Dillon, Azalea; and even if you were, some stray knight might perhaps come this way and break the chains. Do you think, Azalea," he continued, becoming more and more forgetful of his resolutions—"do you think I shall find you married when I come home? Shall I find myself only holding a second place with you, and some one else the first?"

"I don't think, Harold, you could ever be any thing but first with me, whether I marry or not."

"You hardly know what you are talking about, dear. Of course, if you marry, I must become No. 2."

"Shall I promise you, then, not to marry?" she asked, innocently. "I don't think you seem to like the idea."

"No, I don't at all like the idea of your marrying when I am away." He was not hypocrite enough to say, "without your brother being near you." "But you sha'n't promise, you sha'n't be bound in any way. Only, if you are ever tempted to love another very, very dearly, think of me. You don't perhaps realize what I mean now; but then you will understand what I am asking."

"Do you think you will marry while you are away, Harold?" she asked, after a moment's pause. "Perhaps you may bring back a wife with you. Though, be sure, if you work as hard as you intend, you will be too busy for love-making."

"I don't think I shall," he answered, speaking slowly. "Perhaps because, as you say, I shall not have much time for love-making." He stopped short, and, suddenly turning to Azalea, took hold of her by both her wrists. He looked at her in silence for a moment; and then, forgetting all his caution, went on, hurriedly, "Oh, my darling, whatever the future may have in store for us, let us, if possible, meet again as we part now. I won't let you promise; but try and let it be so. We are all in all to one another now. God grant it may be so when we meet again! It is our real parting now, dearest," he went on, drawing her toward him till her head almost rested on his shoulder. "Azalea, I have never yet given you even a cousin's kiss; let me kiss you now."

He was holding her close to him, and as she turned her face to his, she threw both her arms round his neck, and their lips met in a loving embrace.

In that moment the icy surface of Azalea's nature gave way, and a true, enduring love rose up within her. Her feeling was so strong and sudden that she was half stunned by it, and wholly unconscious of all it meant. She only clung closer to her cousin.

"I never meant this," said Harold, the first to recover himself. "My darling, that kiss shall be our parting sacrament—an outward sign of our great inward love. But we must not forget that for many years to come we must not expect more than signs, that we must not hope to be more to one another than we are to-day. With God's mercy, however, the time will come when all clouds shall be dispersed, and we may hope to be one for all eternity." Then he added, looking half smilingly into her dreamy eyes, dreamier-looking than ever for the love-trance in which she seemed, "Now, my own darling, go home, straight down that road. We have had a sweeter parting than I had ever hoped for, or dreamed of allowing myself."

Without having spoken a word, Azalea turned and went down the road she was directed, as if she were walking in her sleep. Harold strided off across country, at the rate of five miles an hour, and only reached home in time for dinner.

The next morning he was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE years after the closing of the last chapter, Azalea was sitting by herself in the window of the library at Dillon one November afternoon, busy with a book, which so engrossed her that she did not hear the door

open, and was suddenly startled by a rather loud, full voice, which exclaimed,

"Why, no one here! I made sure of catching Mr. Chiltern sitting, as usual, at his writing-table."

The voice was strange to Azalea, and so was the lady with whom she found herself confronted on emerging from her retreat behind the curtain. She was dressed in a close-fitting riding-habit, her figure rather shorter than Azalea's, but broader across the shoulders, which were well thrown back, and crowned by a well-shaped head, at the back of which lay her dark hair in close plaits. Her eyes were dark and bright, her complexion that of a brunette, with a deep, brilliant red color on either cheek: altogether, she was a handsome woman, though in voice and manner somewhat loud and masculine.

"Ah," she exclaimed, as soon as Azalea appeared, "there's some one! I suppose you must be the Miss Chiltern who came soon after we went away. I meant to creep in here and give Mr. Chiltern a start; so, as I met old Tom on the drive, I gave over my horse to him and opened the door for myself; and I was so disappointed to find no one here. Dear me," she went on, "how little changed this room looks since I was here last! The same books, even, on the table. But, somehow," she added, turning to Azalea, "you look out of keeping with the place. In old days I never found another young lady here. Let me have a look at you, my dear." And, taking Azalea by the hand, she turned her round to the light, looked at her for a few minutes, and then exclaimed, "Why, my dear girl, do you know you are perfectly lovely! Just fancy your being such a beauty! no one told me that. Do they know down here how pretty you are?"

"I never heard any one say so," answered Azalea, laughing, and wondering who this eccentric lady could be who had got into the house. Tom apparently knew her, and that was some security.

"Well, only fancy such a beautiful girl being buried alive at Dillon!" continued the stranger. "I have been about the world, my dear, and know real beauty from simple prettiness when I see it; and though I am a woman, I haven't a bit of woman's jealousy about me. If you had only been in Paris the right winter, you might have been Empress of the French."

In those days it was rather the fashion for every beautiful girl to think that, but for an unlucky accident which had prevented her meeting the ruler of France at the right moment, she might have shared his greatness.

"Thank you," answered Azalea, laughing again; "but I am not so ambitious." And then she continued: "You seem to have been able to guess who I am; but do you know, I am so stupid, I can't imagine who you are."

"Can't you?" said the figure in the habit. "Then I am afraid they don't now often talk about me here, or you would have guessed at a glance. Have you never heard of Mrs. Elliot, Madge Lifford that was?"

"Oh, are you Madge?" exclaimed Azalea, brightening and interested at once. "Of course I have heard of you. When I first came, they used to talk so much of you."

"And they haven't so much lately?" asked the other, quickly. "I wonder if they have been very hard on me." Then, after a pause, she added, abruptly, "Look here. Come and sit down in the window with me, and tell me how the land lies here, and what they have really thought of my doings. I have had to meet with a great many cold looks lately, but I don't expect to find any in this house. I can't make out why, but I care more for Uncle John's and even for Mr. Chiltern's opinion of me, than I do for that of half the grand people in Paris and London. I used to be able to make them forgive me any thing. I hope it won't be different now." And she drew Azalea toward the window, and make her sit down beside her.

There was a warm frankness and geniality of manner in her new companion that attracted Azalea, but she was not prepared to repeat all the criticisms of Madge that she had heard, even had she been able to remember them, which was far from being the case. Her impression of the discussions concerning Madge in past years was that Harold had judged her very severely, the vicar rather less so, and that Mr. Chiltern had been very lenient, and would not now be likely to meet his old favorite with coldness.

"Tell me," went on Mrs. Elliot, "did they think me desperately wicked to run off to Scotland? You know all I have been about these last ten years, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think I know pretty well. I don't know that they thought it very wicked. I think they thought you ought to have waited. Harold thought the worst of it."

"Master Harold, indeed! So he took it into his wise young head to blame me very severely, did he?" This was said in a half-scoffing manner, which hardly concealed from Azalea the vexation which underlay it, and which made her resent less than she would otherwise have done the disparaging tone in which Harold was spoken of.

"My impression is that he thought you ought to have waited a little then, and been more patient afterward."

"Ah! afterward was worse, I know," said Madge, softening. "But they don't know how much I was tried. I was never properly broken in," she went on, with a half-tear gathering in her eye, and a sadness of man-

ner that drew Azalea toward her. "But I think I could have been a good wife to a good man. However," she said, more cheerfully, "I mean to bury all that for a few months, and be the old Madge to every body down here, and they must and shall forget all my misdeeds; at any rate, while we are at Chiltern. The happiest years of my life were spent at the Chase, and I mean to conjure up the old times again, and for a while forget every thing that has happened since I was sixteen. Isn't that Mr. Chiltern? I am sure I hear his voice. I hope he did not see my horse, and I will surprise him yet."

They both remained seated in the window, and as soon as Mr. Chiltern and the vicar were well in the room, Madge suddenly confronted them, with a saucy expression which only half concealed her anxiety as to the reception with which she was likely to be met.

"Here's your naughty truant come back to be scolded and forgiven," she said. There was a slight nervousness in her manner, though her voice was steady.

Both men started with surprise at the apparition, and she seized a hand of each.

"Why, Madge, my girl, where did you drop from?" asked Mr. Chiltern. "At any rate, it's a great pleasure to see you in this room again."

Madge's face at once changed, and the tears gathered in her eyes, as all fear of a cold welcome vanished. She could stand out bravely against hard looks; but it was more difficult to forget all her past faults when she met with kindness. She turned for an instant to the window, and brushed the tears from her eyes, saying,

"Never mind how I got here, but here I am; and I mean to forget every thing that has happened since I was last in this room, and to be happy again in the old place and in the old way."

"Let by-gones be by-gones," said Mr. Chiltern, characteristically glad to put all that was unpleasant from him. "You are a good girl to come over here so soon. Is Lady Margaret at the Chase?"

"No: she comes to-morrow. I couldn't stand London any longer, and so started off yesterday with my maid and my horse. They are busy getting the Chase ready, and to-morrow mother will be here."

"As impetuous as ever, Madge," said the vicar.

"Worse than ever, Uncle John," she answered. "If I mean to move, I can't wait a day till I am off. Dear me, how you used to talk to me about being patient! I believe, though you never thought so, your sermons did me a great deal of good. See what happened when I couldn't hear them."

"Were not the sermons you have heard since equally useful to you?"

"I should think not. I haven't listened to one to do me any good since your last. Abroad they generally had a 'By the waters of Babylon' kind of tone about them that was simply comical. Fancy that kind of thing to a smartly-dressed congregation, traveling for its pleasure, or—till disagreeable things had blown over at home," she added with an odd, truthful look. She could not class herself with mere pleasure-seekers. "But I will be fair," Madge continued, after a pause. "I don't want to lay all my ill deeds at the door of the bad sermons. I will tell you all about them in time, and you shall judge. I don't think, when you know how much I was tried, you will blame me too much."

"Never mind about explanations, Madge," said Mr. Chiltern, who had a nervous dislike to scenes of every description, and preferred to know as little as possible, if more complete knowledge would force him to condemn. "As I said before, let by-gones be by-gones. We were luckily far away when your marriage, and all that followed it, took place, and need have no opinion on the subject. You come back here with your mother, and you shall always find the old warm welcome at Dillon, as long as I am its master."

"Mr. Chiltern, I believe you are, and always will be, the kindest friend I have," said Madge.

She spoke to Mr. Chiltern, but she looked at the vicar. One word from him condoning the past would have been more to her than all Mr. Chiltern's welcome and unquestioning pardon, for the very reason that she knew it would not be given unquestioned. But she looked in vain for such a word.

Had their home only held the same inmates it had done when Madge went away, her past conduct and present tastes would have mattered comparatively little, and Mr. Purvies might have echoed his friend's words of welcome. But when he thought of Azalea he was silent, and listened to Mr. Chiltern with some misgiving. If Madge was to be constantly at Dillon, an intimacy between the girls would follow as a matter of course; and he could not contemplate without uneasiness the prospect of his pure young pupil being brought into contact with one whose nature had run the risk of being seriously tainted by the life she had led during the last few years.

In past days he had been very fond of Madge. She had been an open-hearted girl, with the possibility, in good hands, of developing into a really fine character. She had always been rather loud and "horsey," but he had hoped that, as she grew older, her fastness would disappear, and that, under the control of a good husband—one with a stronger, firmer will than her own, and yet with so gentle a hand that she would hardly know that she was being guided—all that

was fine and generous in her nature would develop and increase. Such an influence the vicar himself in former days had been to her; and when she had left Chiltern at sixteen, he had hoped that she was gradually becoming all he could wish.

But she escaped from him too young to make his influence lasting, and no one had taken his place. Her mother was a gentle, good woman, who always gave way to her daughter if she could possibly do so; and, although Madge loved her in her own wayward manner, she was never guided by her. Once removed from Mr. Purvies's advice, she had followed her own headstrong will in every wild direction it had led her, with the direst results to herself and to all who loved her.

The man she had married had been a weak, vain, but very obstinate male beauty, impressed with the idea that the woman he had honored by eloping with ought to be very grateful to him for so doing; and doubly so when he discovered, as a fact, what he had not at the time realized, that till Madge came of age—which was not, in her case, till she was five-and-twenty—she was penniless. Her fortune eventually would be large, but she was prevented by stringent conditions from in any way anticipating it; and they were therefore very poor when they married, and both were unaccustomed to the inconveniences of poverty.

Captain Elliot had been taught to consider that, with his handsome face and a commission in the Guards, his fortune was made; and when, shortly after his marriage, he had been confronted with the real state of the case, he considered Madge had, as it were, "taken him in," and that it was her fault that they were condemned to a life of comparative privation. He had been attracted by her liveliness and vigor, but had never loved her nearly so much as his own handsome self; and when her quick wit was directed against himself and hurt his vanity, he soon ceased to appreciate it, and his weak love gave place to a peevish dislike.

With Madge it was different. She had formed a high ideal, and, fancying she had found it in Captain Elliot, she had thrown all the force of her vehement nature into her affection for him. But its very vehemence made it all the more sensitive to any falling short in what she imagined she had found. The first unkind word she heard from his lips had seemed to her like the murder of their love; the first mean thought she discovered in his mind dethroned her idol. And when she found that she had daily to encounter both unkind words and mean thoughts, her strong love was transformed into almost passionate hatred.

In fact, the happiness of their married life had barely outlasted their honey-moon; and then had followed a miserable existence of mutual recrimination, in which it was difficult to say which of the two was the more to blame. Madge was violent and headstrong; her husband was obstinate, mean, and ungenerous; and when Madge at length left him, although it could hardly be said that it was by their mutual consent (as it was the result of a violent quarrel, after which she refused to see him again), still he was glad that she should go.

Had Madge only possessed sufficient self-control to have waited and allowed others to settle their differences for them, the lawyers would no doubt have taken sufficiently long time about the preliminaries to have made any separation unnecessary. But she was very unlucky. She left her husband's house in Paris alone and at night, and took refuge with her mother, much in the same way as she had left her old home a few years back for Captain Elliot's. His death, following so speedily, had made her conduct appear worse than heartless. He had been in good health when she parted with him in her anger; and within a month she was again in the same room, gazing on his placid, lifeless, but still beautiful face, that could never again vex her. Yes, poor Madge was certainly unlucky.

For some time afterward she was hushed and stilled by all that had happened. Its suddenness, and the quick following of death on her violence, quite subdued and softened her. She lived very quietly abroad with her mother, and for more than a year seemed a changed and saddened woman. But her nature was too strong and her life was too vigorous to be completely damped by this one painful episode. By degrees she recovered her spirits; her strong will re-asserted itself, and two years after her husband's death, when she returned to England, no one would have suspected that her life had been grievously shattered so short a time before.

But though Madge could forget, she found that, unfortunately, among both her own and her husband's friends, many did not forget the past. On her return, she had to encounter cold looks which were very trying to her; so trying, that, after a few months in London, she was glad to escape, as we have seen, to Chiltern.

But the Mrs. Elliot who now returned was hardly the same being as the Madge Lifford who had gone away. The past had left its sting behind, and injured her character, or rather had prevented the growth of the finer part of her nature, and had developed the worse. She was still open and frank, but there was now a cynicism in her frankness which jarred, at any rate, on the ear of Mr. Purvies. She had suffered from poverty, and now she was suffering from being slighted; and the result of both forms of suffering was that a touch of worldliness was given to her mind. She now thorough-

ly appreciated the value of money, and was anxious for the notice of people of position, in order to triumph over those in her own set who had slighted her. If some old friends had refused to ask her to their houses, she would now be glad to have the *entrée* to those which belonged to persons of higher rank and fashion, in order to be able to show her indifference to the society of the former. She had, in fact, been dragged through the mire, and some of it had clung to her.

This the vicar soon discovered. He had more than one talk over the past with Madge, and, after listening to a full account of her married life, his sympathetic nature caused him almost to forget to blame severely one whom he pitied so deeply. Were it not for Azalea, he would have been glad to return to their old habit of constant intercourse. He and his friend need fear no harm from her worldliness, nor from her wish to make her way in London society, and all that such a wish implies; but he could not bear to think of Azalea, ignorant as she was of the world, gaining her first knowledge of it through so discolored a medium. She knew nothing of life, and that she should first learn to look on it from Madge's present point of view was intolerable. He even went the length of speaking to Mr. Chiltern on the subject, and begged him to reconsider his promise of welcome, on his niece's account. But he failed to make any impression.

Mr. Chiltern was almost angry with the vicar for expressing a doubt that it was expedient for Madge to come and go as she chose. His old fancy for an alliance between the families had never taken very definite shape; but now that he knew Harold cared enough for the Chase to exile himself, and take to trading, on the mere chance of recovering it, the thought was present with him that here was a far easier method of gaining his object. Madge was once more free, and she showed an encouragingly warm friendship for all that belonged to Dillon. He was not the man actively to take to match-making; but it was too much to suppose that he would decidedly interfere to throw impediments in the way of his wishes; and if he checked the renewed intimacy in any way, he would be so doing.

Azalea was all very well, and he had become used to and fond of her, after a fashion; but he was not disposed to allow that she should in any way interfere with his projects. He was not inclined to wrap her up in cotton-wool.

"If Azalea can't stand being thrown with a girl like Madge," he asked, "how is she to get through life? She is not at all likely to turn wild, and I think Madge will be of all the use in the world to her. She will stir her up, and put a little more life into her. It is just what she needs."

Of course Azalea must expect to meet with worse people than Madge Elliot in her passage through life; but still, the vicar would keep her at arms-length from all possible taint, as long as it was possible to do so. Her purity and fresh innocence were very precious to him, and he could not but wish that Madge had stopped in London or Paris, or anywhere, so long as his Azalea was safe from her worldly Bohemianism.

Notwithstanding this feeling, he was himself fond of Madge—quite as fond, in his way, as Mr. Chiltern was; only he thought very much more of Azalea. Dillon, too, was much less dull a place to the vicar than it was to Mr. Chiltern; and therefore a companion who could talk brightly and amusingly, and who had seen enough of the world to find materials in her past life for so doing, was no great addition to the pleasure of his day. He had his parish to look after, and all the human interest it brought him; and then his studies and books were really of greater value to him.

Mr. Chiltern, on the other hand, was an indolent man, who lacked the energy necessary for real hard work, and therefore the pleasure which follows on hard work was never his. Moreover, he was inclined to look on himself as one whose refinement and sensitive good taste precluded him from the possibility of mixing with the outer world. Vulgarity was such a trial to him that he felt justified in secluding himself, for fear of encountering it outside his library. But, as a fact, when the outer world would take the trouble to seek him in his study, he was not averse from a gossip. The immediate neighbors at Dillon, with the exception of those at the Chase, were so uninteresting that Mr. Chiltern flattered himself he disliked all society, and looked on himself as a somewhat superior being for so doing. But the truth was that he disliked dull society, and was too lazy to make the effort which would be necessary to obtain any other.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY associations made Dillon Grange a very pleasant place to Mrs. Elliot; and as she could have a delightful canter over the downs before reaching it, and Mr. Chiltern gave her a warm welcome when she arrived, and was always ready to listen to her stories and tattle, on most fine days she would find her way to the old library. Azalea proved a further attraction.

Madge had been struck with her beauty the first moment they met, and very soon a scheme occurred to her for utilizing it to her own advantage. In old days, Madge

would simply have enjoyed her society and her lovely face as she enjoyed a landscape, without *arrière pensée;* but her unhappy past had made her more calculating, and she now saw that Azalea's beauty might be of practical use to her, if she could both win the girl's affection and also keep her place in Mr. Chiltern's favor.

She did not openly own to herself that, as she wanted to regain her old footing in London society, it would be a help to her to have a young beauty confided to her care; that many houses might be open to receive them both, which she had reason to fear would be closed against her alone; and that she would find success in the world more easy. No: all she told herself was that, as she had discovered this lovely girl buried alive in a Wiltshire village, without a being for miles around who could appreciate her beauty, she would be doing her a great service by taking her to London, and letting her be seen by the world. If, at the same time, Madge added, she did herself a good turn, who could blame her?

She did not fear much opposition to her scheme from Mr. Chiltern, but she did from the vicar. She soon discovered how much higher a value he set on Azalea than did her uncle; and also, that in her own case he did not allow by-gones to be by-gones in the same happy and oblivious manner. She detected an uneasy expression in the vicar's eye when he saw her and his young favorite together, which she perfectly well understood.

"He thinks I shall soil his snow-drop," she thought to herself, bitterly. But she did not resent this feeling, or feel any anger against Mr. Purvies in consequence. In fact, she respected him the more for his severe view of her past, only she could not afford to comply with his wishes and abandon Azalea's friendship, and with it a good chance of recovering her position in London. It will sometimes unfortunately happen that our past history obliges us to respect our enemies more than our friends; and though Mr. Purvies was far from being an enemy, still he blamed her; and with Madge this was a trial for which all Mr. Chiltern's good-will hardly compensated.

Azalea herself welcomed the pleasant change Madge's society brought into her life. The latter was always in good spirits, and amusing; and as she saw so few people at Dillon, it was no wonder that Azalea was glad of her companionship.

"Do you know, Mr. Chiltern," Madge said one day, soon after her return to the Chase —"do you know you have got a real pearl hidden away in this old Grange? Neither you nor Uncle John seems to know that you have a girl who is as beautiful as a princess in a fairy-tale, shut up with you both."

"What, Azalea?" he asked. "Is she pretty? She is a good girl, and not the trouble I feared she would be when I first undertook her charge; but her future often makes me uneasy."

"Well, yes, I dare say it does. If she were anywhere else, with her beauty, her future ought not to be a matter of concern to any one. But, as far as helping her to find a husband, I fear her looks are now wasting their sweetness on the desert air."

She did not mean to broach her scheme just yet; but it was satisfactory and helpful that Mr. Chiltern should realize the difficulty of finding a settlement for his niece at Dillon.

"She sees, of course, no one here," replied Mr. Chiltern, "and never is likely to see any one. I haven't left this house for fifteen years, and can take her nowhere."

"Of course you can't; and she is now over twenty. Has she any fortune?"

"About fifty pounds a year. Her father died in debt. He was always going to make his fortune by some picture or other, and meanwhile drew on his capital. When his accounts were wound up at his death, we had to sell out some twelve hundred pounds, and this reduced poor Azalea's fortune to about fifty pounds a year."

"Has she got that now?"

"She can have it whenever she wants it."

"What! have her capital out and out, to do what she likes with?"

"I believe so."

"Stop that, Mr. Chiltern, if you can. Tie it up in some way, so that she can't get at the capital. Girls should never be able to touch that," said Madge, looking very wise.

Mr. Chiltern laughed.

"Why, Madge, what can a young lady like you know about money matters? I have never been able fully to realize the difference betwen capital and income; but I should have thought you were worse."

"I am wiser in such matters than I used to be. My manner has not changed so much as I have myself. I have had to think a great deal about pounds, shillings, and pence since old days; and I know that, however small it may be, no girl ought to be able to get at her real fortune. Azalea's just the sort of girl, in a fit of enthusiasm, to go and give it all to build a church. Tie it up, Mr. Chiltern," she said, giving him a parting shake of the hand.

"Fifty pounds a year would not go far in clothes in town," she mused, as she trotted off; "but luckily her style of beauty does not require handsome dressing. I don't believe she would look a bit better in a twenty-guinea silk than she does in her plain black stuff."

Azalea had kept to the same style of dress that she had worn when she first came to England. One plain black dress had succeeded another, the only change being that,

for some years, each one was rather longer and fuller than its predecessor; now even that slight change had ceased. Azalea was entirely without personal vanity, and had she had any, it would hardly have found an outlet at Dillon. She had sufficient taste to see that her simple black was much more becoming than the Miss Foleys' drabs and checks, and there was absolutely no one else with whom she could compare her dress; for many weeks passed before she saw even Madge Elliot in any thing but a riding-habit.

The latter would ride over to Dillon early in the afternoon, put her horse into the stables herself, tuck up her habit more easily than many girls hold up their dress, and stroll for hours about the downs with Azalea. Then, in the same independent manner, she would take out her horse and ride back alone to the Chase. She was a perfect and fearless horsewoman, and had a supreme contempt for those who could not stir a hundred yards without being accompanied by a groom.

In their walks, it was Madge who engrossed the greater part of the conversation. She would rattle on by the hour without needing any answer beyond an occasional assent; and though she never got an unthinking reply from Azalea, yet in her long descriptions of places she had seen, and people she had known, there was little room for any expression of difference of opinion.

Madge was frankness itself with Azalea. She wished to have the forming of her social ideas and tastes, and began early to indoctrinate her with her own views. She must make Azalea see her position with her (Madge's) eyes before she could be sure of gaining her for an ally; and as one means to this end, she trusted to the glowing accounts which she gave of the pleasures of London life.

"I had two seasons, you know, that were perfectly delightful before my foolish marriage," she said one day as they strolled over the downs, and when they had known one another for two months, and become extremely intimate. "And had it not been for that marriage, I might have had half a dozen more, and then have settled down happily with some good man, who would have kept hunters, and let me have all I wanted. However, I don't give up the game yet; but it has become much more difficult; and, then, I had those miserable years of married life."

"But, Madge," put in Azalea, "I can never understand you when you talk about your marriage. You did marry for love, didn't you?"

"No doubt about that."

"And you are sorry you did? You would not do so again?"

"Not only for love; though I would not marry a man I disliked. But I suppose no unmarried girl can quite understand. You think, as I thought, that being in love would go on all one's life, and that there's nothing like it. And no more there is, if it would only last. But it doesn't. If you could only manage to keep that kind of honey-moon feeling through life, there is nothing money can buy that can make you equally happy. But it's sure to go in a few months; and then, you know, one misses one's horses and things. Even with the best of men, one would miss them; and when it comes to selfish barbers' blocks, such as half the men are with whom girls make love-matches—why, it's very bad, indeed."

"But don't you think love can last?" almost pleaded Azalea, to whom Madge's views were very distasteful, but who felt her ignorance to be such that she hardly ventured to question the truth of all that her more experienced friend told her.

"Only in a few exceptional cases that prove my rule. The best thing you can look forward to is marrying a kind man, whose tastes are the same as your own, and who can give you what you really care for. I shall not suffer from poverty again, as I shall be five-and-twenty next summer, and then get my fortune; but, for all that, I sha'n't marry the very first man I fancy. I know exactly what I want."

Not only did Madge know the kind of husband she was anxious to secure, but she knew the man who embodied her idea of what would suit her. This very knowledge may have been an additional incentive toward her anxiety to secure Azalea's society in London, and to find her a suitable husband. She had sufficient penetration to notice that Azalea took more than a cousin's interest in Harold, and it ill suited her views that he should return from India and find his lovely cousin unmarried. Madge knew that with most men her own attractions would pass unnoticed if Azalea were present; and she was anxious that Harold should find her very attractive.

"Fancy having decided what kind of man you wish to marry," said Azalea, after a pause. "To be sure, in London, where you see so many men, it may be different; but it sounds so odd to me. I shall miss you so much when you go to London. Dillon has been so much more lively since you came."

"It must be very dull for a girl of your age. I know you are fond of books; but still, it must be very dull. Do you ever think of the future, Azalea?"

"Why, what about the future?"

"Well, can you see yourself turning into a handsome edition of one of the Miss Foleys, with complacency? You will always be handsome; but don't you wish for a brighter future than that of a Dillon old maid?"

"I have never thought about it at all.

I suppose I shall always go on living at the Grange."

"But you ought to think. Here you are, already over twenty, and have never even seen a man who would make you a suitable husband. And as to always living at the Grange, why, dull life as it is, you may perhaps not always be able to lead it. What should you say if Harold brought a wife back with him?" This was put out as a feeler. "She would hardly be as handsome as you are, and would love you accordingly; and then the Grange would not be very pleasant."

"I don't think Harold means to marry now," answered Azalea. "Anyhow," she added, warmly, "I am sure he would never turn me out. Besides, there is Uncle John to take care of me."

"I believe he really would do any thing in the world for you. He used to love Harold first and me next; but it's easy to see now that he cares more for a hair of your head than for both of us together. But of what use is that? He is as old as Mr. Chiltern, and as likely as not to be the first to go; and when neither of them is here, what could you do but become a Miss Foley? Take my word for it, you ought to get married; and if it was only properly managed, you could secure a suitable offer before six months are over."

"How can you talk so, Madge?" exclaimed Azalea, indignantly. "I don't want to secure an offer from any one."

"Don't cry out, my child," answered Madge. "I am only stating a very simple fact, about which there can not be two opinions. You are very beautiful, and if there were only any men about you, they would be sure to fall in love with you, and you might avoid becoming a Miss Foley. I am only stating a simple truth; you need not be angry with me."

"I don't mean to be angry," said Azalea, half mollified. "Only, I don't like you to think I need any one to come and marry me."

"I dare say, dear, you don't. It hurts one's pride to want any thing from any one. But the fact remains all the same. There are very few unmarried women who don't want husbands, and comparatively few men who do want wives. It's a sadly undignified plight this nineteenth-century civilization has landed us in, I am quite willing to own; but still there it is. I know myself, as well as possible, that I want a husband; one would be of the greatest service to me. I have not got the best of positions in the world; people are ill-natured, and say all sorts of harm of me; and I very much need the help of a man who is bound to protect me. We both want husbands for different reasons; only my chances in London are far better than yours down at Dillon."

"There is no reason for my marrying at all," said Azalea, decidedly. "But, luckily, I don't see the necessity of doing so as strongly as you seem to do."

"That's only because you are so ignorant of life," returned Madge. "I dare say thirty years ago Miss Foley did not see the need either; but, all the same, her life would have been very different had she married."

"Well," said Azalea, speaking emphatically, "I don't think it's at all lady-like to wish to be married in the abstract like that."

"It may not be lady-like, but it's very womanish, and very natural. Does not every body say, when they hear a girl is going to be married, that they are very glad of it? And, of course, the girl is glad herself, let alone altogether being in love. Only there's an absurdly conventional way of talking, which would lead people to suppose there was something to be ashamed of in the wish. Every body knows what every body wishes, only they all agree to play a sort of 'nobody-wants-to-be-married' farce; and they try to play it so well, that every body shall believe it is true. But, of course, it's only a game, and all the world knows it is only a game."

"And am I playing it too?" asked Azalea, simply.

"So far, I think you are an exception. Your solitary life in this out-of-the-way place has kept you absurdly ignorant for your age; but if, after a season in London, you talked as you have been doing this afternoon, I should simply think you affected. Would you like to come to London, Azalea?"

"The idea has never crossed my mind. I have never been farther than the Chase since I came to England, and I see no chance of getting even as far as Salisbury."

"But if you think you would really like to come to London, dear, there *shall* be a chance of your doing so."

"How could I go, Madge?" asked Azalea. "Of course, I should like seeing the things and hearing the music you describe, and knowing people, and listening to clever talk; but what is the use of my thinking of such things? If Uncle John heard me express a wish to go to a ball, he would think my being with you had quite turned my head; and if I asked for a season in London, he would think I had gone out of my senses."

"I dare say Mr. Purvies might, but your uncle would only be too glad for you to go. And I tell you what, Azalea—if you will only stand by me firmly, and be quite sure, whenever you are asked, that of all things you would like to come to town with us next April, come you shall."

"Go to London with you in the spring!" exclaimed Azalea, amazed and delighted at the idea of the new life that in such a case would open out before her. "Do you mean

to say you would really like to take me, Madge?"

"Yes, I should — very much. I have quite enough good taste left to know that you are a very charming girl, and to find great pleasure in being with you. You are so beautiful too, I do not like to think that no one can see you. Besides, I won't disguise that I think you might be very useful to me in London."

"Why, Madge, what *could* I do for you?"

"Help me to win back friends with your pretty face much faster than I could ever do by the most discreet conduct. With you I shall be perfectly frank; though I don't promise to be equally so with Mr. Chiltern, when I ask his consent. But you shall see exactly how things are before you take your stand for or against me."

Madge felt quite safe with Azalea when she promised to be frank. She was going to appeal to her generosity as against a hard-hearted world, and she had but little fear as to the result.

Madge so often asserted it, that by this time Azalea had almost come to believe that Captain Elliot had been a man whom his wife was justified in leaving. Madge never excused her original elopement, but always maintained that it had been sufficiently atoned for by her subsequent sufferings.

"Do you think," she asked now—"do you think I ought to be made to suffer all my life for coming back to my mother as I did? Surely I did not do wrong in that?"

"I don't know; I don't think so," said Azalea, hesitatingly. "Still, it is 'for better, for worse,' you know."

"Ah, that's all very well, if you think only of outside troubles. If they come, I quite agree you ought to cling all the closer at home. But when you know your mere presence irritates a man, and is the very 'worse' to him, surely it is best to go."

"I always pitied you very much for being so unhappy," said Azalea, who thought it would be almost presumptuous to differ from her friend, whose knowledge of the world was so much greater than her own.

"And so would any one, who had not a heart of stone," rejoined Madge. "But yet, do you know, when I came back to England, numbers of people who had been my friends in old days received me so coldly. Old dragons would not let me come near their daughters, for fear, I suppose, that I should contaminate the pink-and-white nonentities; and houses where I had been quite intimate were closed to me. Do you think I am likely to harm any one?" she added, appealing warmly to her companion. "I have been more with you lately than with any one else; do you think I have hurt you?"

"Hurt me! No, certainly, I don't think so," returned Azalea.

She was fond of Madge, and as every thing that jarred against her taste in her friend's opinions and talk was known to her through Madge's frankness, and not through her own acuteness, she did not think so much of Madge's low standard and laxity as she would have done had she discovered them for herself. A sure way to disarm the criticism of the young is to forestall it, by owning that we deserve all the blame we may fear from them. Later on in life we recognize the *ruse*, and do not allow our judgment to be influenced by it; but however firm and high a girl's principles may be, her affection can be thus worked on by any one possessed of the necessary art. It was only half consciously used by Madge; but still it was used.

"I *know*," she continued, "I do you no harm; and yet I am convinced Uncle John would give half his books that I had never seen you."

"Why should he?" asked Azalea, astonished. "You must be mistaken. How can you harm me? I feel so much brighter since you came. I think, after Harold went and before you came, it was too dull."

"Well, you know men surround their idols with a sort of halo, which they fear the outside air may dissipate. Mr. Purvies thinks me a very rough wind, I suspect, that ought to be kept from blowing on his sensitive-plant. He likes me for old associations' sake; but still, I am sure he is sorry we ever came back to the Chase; and I think he will do his best to prevent my taking you to London. Your uncle would let you come at once, and be very glad that you should. But when Mr. Purvies tries to dissuade you, mind you stand firm; and then, perhaps, his dislike to thwarting you may prevent his persisting."

"I should not like to annoy dear old Uncle John," said Azalea. "But my uncle and he never differ. What one thinks right, the other always agrees to."

"Well, I hope they may be equally one-minded in this case; and since what you think is agreement generally, I suspect, consists in Mr. Purvies giving up his opinion to your uncle, I have great hopes they may be. If we are once in town together, I foresee we shall have a *grand succès*. You shall be the beauty, and I will do the lively conversation. Not but what I am good-looking too; only I know I must not compare myself with you. Our house will be so attractive that there won't be a man in London worth speaking to that will not be glad to come to it. I shall go nowhere without you, and you must go nowhere without me; and all those who shunned me last year will have to welcome me this. People will forget to be ill-natured when they find they lose you by doing so."

"But why should people want me?" asked Azalea, still puzzled.

"Because you are so very pretty, child. You don't know what useful capital good looks are in London. Why, your face would be an addition to any ball-room; and those who are bent on giving pretty balls will take care to have you at them. Then they must ask me too—and—why, we shall both enjoy ourselves. Now don't you understand how we can mutually help one another? You have a dull life down here; and I find London society rather uphill work all by myself; and I hope you care enough for me to help me."

"Of course I do, Madge. Of course I should enjoy going; and if I can be really useful, why, I should only be more delighted than ever. Do you think my uncle will let me go?"

"I will talk to him. I am sure if he were alone, it would not be difficult to persuade him. But whether Mr. Purvies will be able to prevent his consenting, I don't know."

CHAPTER X.

MADGE'S presentiment was correct. She found very little difficulty in proving to Mr. Chiltern that it would be well that Azalea should have the proposed change; he gave his consent after half an hour's conversation. But when the vicar learned that he had done so, Madge's real difficulties began.

Mr. Purvies could not endure the thought of Azalea being introduced into London society under the wing of a woman of damaged reputation. His quiet country life and strict principles led him to take the severest view of Madge's past; and it was intolerable to him that Azalea should run the risk of being associated in a future in which he felt no confidence.

She herself was hardly brought into the conflict. Both her uncle and the vicar had the habit of still looking on her as a child, and would no more have discussed the plan with her than parents would criticise the merits of different schools with the children who are to go to one of them. Only once did Azalea, during a walk with the vicar, break silence on the subject.

"Dear Uncle John," she said, "don't try to prevent my going to London with the Liffords. I should like one glimpse into the world."

"What, Azalea," he answered, somewhat sadly—"do you want to find out for yourself the falseness of all the glitter Madge has been describing to you as so brilliant? I don't think, my child, such knowledge will make you any the happier; and you are likely to come back to this quiet life with very little taste for it. For a few months of not the most wholesome form of enjoyment, you run the risk of having to endure years of discontent."

"Can't you trust me more than that?" said Azalea, reproachfully. "I can promise you not to be discontented when I come home. I quite understand that all my life can not be like a season in London; but seeing a little of the world surely can not hurt me. And then, when I come home, I shall have the memory of the music and pictures to live on, besides Westminster Abbey, which even you own to be finer than our church, and all the other beautiful things I shall have seen. You know it's not only balls and society that I shall care for, but for all that will make my memory fuller and richer. I have seen so little; and although I know I have had books, still even books can not teach one every thing. You told me yesterday to study Lessing's "Laocoon;" but will it not be more useful for me to do so after I have seen a cast of the statue?"

"Of course, my dear, in London there are short cuts to learning, which are very attractive," answered the vicar, rather unfairly. It would have been impossible for him to hint his real objection to Azalea; and he preferred she should imagine that his opposition arose from a general dislike of London and its ways. "I see your heart seems set on going; and as your uncle and Madge have also made up their minds, nothing I can say is likely to alter their decision. I only wish Madge had never thought of it."

The vicar was not equal to winning when his friend, Madge, and his *protégée* herself were all against him; and within a week of the matter having been broached, it was decided that, immediately after Easter, Lady Margaret and Madge would go up to the house in Hill Street, taking Azalea with them for a few months' visit.

"You must let me have fifty pounds out of Azalea's fortune, Mr. Chiltern," said Madge, "and I will see that she is properly dressed. She is so lovely that there is no need for very handsome clothes; only she must have a few evening things that she never wants down here."

"You shall have one hundred pounds at once," answered Mr. Chiltern, who could never foresee difficulty in finding any money that might be asked for, "only it sha'n't come out of Azalea's fortune. Strange to say, at the end of a quarter I have a wonderful balance of three figures at my bankers'. It's a long time since I have been so rich. Till it was over, I don't suppose I knew how expensive Harold's education was. I have felt in good funds ever since that ceased."

"I dare say it was a drain."

"I did not think of it at the time. The boy had to go to Eton and Oxford, and I had to find the money for it. As far as I can now see, I might as well have sent him

to a commercial school at Devizes. His education will not be of much use to him in the line he has chosen."

"Yes, it will, Mr. Chiltern. Harold ought to have been brought up like a gentleman, and then, when he's a rich man, he'll be quite perfect. I suspect he means to win the Chase back again, and I should not in the least mind his having it. However, never mind Harold, who, from all accounts, is doing as well as possible; it's Azalea with whom we are now concerned. I want you to let me have a look at the wardrobes upstairs. I dare say I shall be able to find some old lace and a few things that will help to dress her, and make a little money go a long way."

And, permission being granted, Madge and Azalea spent hours in rummaging among the possessions of former Mrs. Chilterns, and had soon before them a large pile of lace, velvets, and satins, which, if somewhat out of date, might still be made useful.

"These will do grandly for a fancy ball; but, as a rule, Azalea, I think you must wear only black or white," settled Madge. "Come, here's enough black velvet in this train to make you a beautiful dress. I have never been able to wear velvet myself, and never shall, till I get paralyzed. My movements are all so much too abrupt and quick. Unfortunately for me, a riding-habit is the thing I look best in; and I can't, as a rule, be in one more than four hours a day. But you have just the slow, grand way of moving that suits velvet and trains and that style of thing. You would make a magnificent duchess, Azalea. I look only fit to be a bar-maid beside you."

"What nonsense you talk!" remonstrated Azalea. "I am sure I feel much the smaller person of the two."

"But you don't look it. Of course, you can't talk so much as I can, and have much less worldly wisdom and knowledge, though in real learning you are my superior. But you oughtn't to go in for much talking; what you are fit for is, to sit still and look beautiful and be worshiped. Every one ought to keep to her own style, and yours is to be grandly and silently interesting. I should find that rather dull; but you mustn't."

"I would rather be simply myself than any style," returned Azalea. "Besides, I sha'n't like never being allowed to open my lips," she added, laughing.

"Well, you shall now and then; only remember, it must never be to say any thing commonplace; and, on the whole, you must be a great deal better known for your beauty than for your conversation, just as I am better known for talking than for looks. In your dress and all I mean to keep up the idea of your being a very *interesting* person. You shall be got up like a picture, and we will even utilize your name; you shall always wear azaleas: that's the sort of thing to catch people's fancy, when it's done by a pretty girl. If you were ugly, it would be called nonsense and affectation; but when a lovely girl is called by the name of a beautiful flower, and then always wears one, why, it's only another point of interest about her. Being a beauty certainly makes life very easy," almost sighed Madge. "Why, I really believe, with your looks, you might quote Greek and not be called a blue-stocking."

In this way Madge would rattle on for half an hour at a time, hardly needing any reply. Azalea allowed herself to be somewhat of an automaton in her friend's hands. From so often hearing it asserted that she was very beautiful, she simply believed it; but beyond a new fact having been added to her stock of knowledge, the news in no way affected her vision of the future. That she was beautiful had not sunk very deeply into her mind; and though, as we have seen, Madge was far from concealing from her the use she considered she ought to make of her good looks, her talk had made but little impression. Madge talked so fast that Azalea did not attach weight to every thing she said; and her simplicity and freedom from vanity were so great, that she thought no more of Madge's flattery than of her friend's more ordinary gossip.

Azalea's character was a curious mixture of dreaminess and practical good sense. Whenever she did make up her mind on a subject, her opinion would be a sensible one; but, till she had thought it out, her ideas on the matter were wrapped in a mist, through which she saw with difficulty. London, and the effect it was to have on her life, and the use Madge wished to make of her beauty, were still in this hazy dream-land. Madge had for long dwelt on the delights of brilliant parties and balls, and the pleasure of meeting distinguished and clever men; and then she had suddenly drawn a picture of Azalea herself in the midst of such gatherings, and forming no unimportant part of them, and had explained how easily the vision could become a reality, if only she would herself decidedly wish that it should so become.

Without half understanding what she heard, Azalea agreed that she would like to go to London, and that a season there would be delightful. So far was it out of her range of expectations that at first she hardly knew how to be glad that she was to go. She could more easily imagine herself enjoying a few country parties at Salisbury; but the constant whirl of gayety and life into which she was soon to be thrown was beyond her power to realize. She felt much as a Dorsetshire laborer, struggling to keep alive a family on eight shillings a week,

might feel, if he were suddenly told that he had inherited ten thousand pounds a year; he would more easily understand that life in the future was to be a better thing for him, if he heard that his wages were to be raised to a pound a week.

Nor had Azalea really grasped in what way Madge hoped to make her presence serve her own ends. How should she understand the ins and outs of London society, when all her knowledge of England was gathered from a small village hidden away in the Wiltshire downs? She only vaguely imagined that London was a very delightful place, and that for some reason which she could only half master, Madge was anxious she should have a share in its delights, and that she would do her a service by consenting to accompany her. And preliminaries having been settled, Azalea was taken to the Chase one evening early in April; and next morning the three ladies started for London.

CHAPTER XI.

What has Harold been about during the three and a half years that have passed since he left Dillon? How far has the oyster yielded to his knife, and how much nearer is he to the opening of it?

We may say at once that he was some little way on the road to prosperity, and that the luck he had prophesied would attend his adventures had not deserted him. We must follow his footsteps for a few paces along the road.

It was on an afternoon in dull, misty November weather, as the reader may remember, that he started in an Indian mail steamer from Southampton. He felt rather lonely and lost, this first evening. On board the steamer he knew no one; and all the other passengers seemed as if they formed part of a happy family, all knowing more or less of one another.

There had been many tearful partings before the steamer started, but these seemed now to be forgotten. The mothers who but a few hours since were clinging with heart-breaking sobs to the children from whom they were parting, were now comparatively happy, bustling about and arranging their cabins, while the ship was in quiet waters, and at length sitting down with smiling faces to the four-o'clock dinner—the last meal they would probably grace with their presence for some days to come. In a few hours they would be past the Needles and in the open Channel, which was not likely to be smooth in November; and the Channel would only be exchanged for the still more dreaded Bay of Biscay.

Nearly all the passengers were bound for Calcutta, and formed part of that large Indian society, all knowing one another intimately, as if they were, what many actually are, nearly related. To Harold this circle was absolutely unknown; but he was not likely to feel lonely for long. He did not care much for ladies' society, but he quickly made friends with men, and was generally popular among them.

Even on the first evening he found an introduction to his fellow-passengers. He was quietly watching the luggage as it was being lowered into the hold by means of a small engine on deck, and marveling at the enormous dimensions of the ladies' boxes, more especially of those painted in large letters with the name of Macgregor, which were many in number, when his eye caught that of Fitzroy Campbell on a small, modest-looking portmanteau, and at the same moment a sandy-haired Scotchman came forward and rescued it from being consigned to the hold. He was carrying it off to his cabin, when Harold stopped him with,

"I am sure I must be speaking to the brother of a great friend of mine, Alan Campbell, of Merton?"

"Yes," was the answer; "Alan's a brother of mine. Ah!" he continued, "then you will be Chiltern, I suppose. Alan was not sure if you meant to come in this steamer, but he told me to look out for you. I am very glad we have met." And the elder man shook Harold cordially by the hand.

He was some fifteen years older than our hero, was already high up in the Indian Civil Service, knew nearly every one on board, and soon dispelled Chiltern's fear that he was to suffer from dullness during the voyage. By the time the *cornet-à-piston*, which announced all the meals on board the Peninsular and Oriental steamers, had informed the passengers that hot wine-and-water awaited them below, Harold had made some half-dozen acquaintances, and had discussed the prospects of the voyage with most of them.

The steamer, he found, was not considered at all overcrowded for November, a favorite month for the outward passage; there were very few ladies compared with the mail before, but then, as if to atone for this want, they had as fellow-passenger one special lady, whose very presence seemed to give a tone and distinction to the voyage, and whose name Harold had heard before he had been many minutes on board, and had seen repeated again and again on the big boxes. It was now being passed from stewardess to steward, from purser to captain, in a way which showed that its owner was considered to be a person of no little importance.

"Mind what you are about with Mrs. Macgregor's No. 7," a steward said, to warn the men who were lowering the luggage

into the hold. "She may want it at Malta, so be sure you remember where to find it."

"Mrs. Macgregor's dressing-case is mislaid!" exclaimed the stewardess in dismay, as she rushed about the saloon in search of it.

"Mrs. Macgregor is not sure her birth lies the right way," said a young officer to the purser. "She wants to know if the *Alexandria* rolls or pitches: if she rolls, her birth must be changed."

"Just fancy my luck," exclaimed a boy ensign in Harold's hearing. "If I squint very hard, I can get a full-face view of Mrs. Macgregor from my place at dinner!"

Harold began to be rather curious as to the object of all this care and solicitude. Mrs. Macgregor had hardly acquired a European reputation; but before he had been long on board, he began to feel that not to know her was to own himself unknown.

At dinner his curiosity was to some extent relieved by a sight of the lady. She came in very late, and displaced at least seven gentlemen before she reached her chair. A small woman, beautifully dressed—even Harold's eye, unused as it was to feminine millinery, saw at a glance that she was well dressed, though he had sufficient taste to guess that she was overdressed for a dinner on board ship—in long, flowing silk, trimmed with lace, and a great deal of jewelry. A perfect little figure, a small head with a quantity of fair hair much displayed, with two long curls hanging down on either side behind; a brilliant pink-and-white complexion, and indifferent but expressive features. Such was the little person who, as soon as she entered the saloon, seemed to become the centre of all attraction.

She walked to her seat composedly, amidst the obsequious attention of half a dozen stewards and a number of gentlemen on either side of her, who at once began crushing closer to one another, in order to avoid the slightest chance of her being inconvenienced by crowding. Her corner soon became the liveliest in the room. She seemed to talk unceasingly. If she said any thing that was intended for a joke, good or bad, every body laughed; if she meant to be pathetic, all looked sad. In fact, it was evident that all around wished to keep in perfect sympathy with her; and that, whatever she might be outside it, in the little world on board the steamer she was decidedly the fashion.

Just before dinner was finished she rose from her seat, and with a bow which included all at her end of the table, said,

"Now I will wish you all 'good-bye' for a few days; and if some one will knock at my cabin when the coast of Portugal is in sight, I shall be much obliged, and will come on deck—but not before."

"You won't really be so cruel, Mrs. Macgregor?" pleaded a stout general, who was very much amused by all she said, and did not like losing his fun for four days.

"I can assure you, Mrs. Macgregor, it's the worst plan to shut yourself up in your cabin," said a young Bengal officer, who was disposed to teach every one, Mrs. Macgregor into the bargain. There's nothing like very young men for thinking "women want putting in the way of things."

"Teach your grandmother, etc., etc., you silly boy," returned Mrs. Macgregor, giving him a patronizing tap on the shoulder with her fan, much to the discomfiture of the youth, and to the enjoyment of those around. If it had not been already so evident that it was *the thing* during this voyage to be on good terms with Mrs. Macgregor, he would never have forgiven her. "I know what I am about. If somebody will tell me when Portugal is in sight, I shall know when to come out; but I don't stir before. And if any one tries to hoax me, and brings me false news, I sha'n't speak to him the whole way out; so he won't gain much by it."

When a lady seems to think that she can inflict a very sensible punishment by refusing to speak to you, and supposes that her advent will be much wished for, you are naturally apt to take her at her own value, and to believe that she really can affect your happiness. No doubt much homage was offered to Mrs. Macgregor, and she quietly accepted it, and assumed by her manner that there was still more in reserve; and, so far, she had never found the men who formed her court rebel against her airs of absolute sovereignty.

Having made a parting bow to the friends round her, and nodded and smiled to half the people as she walked the length of the saloon, she disappeared into her cabin with as much fuss and as many attendant stewards as when she had emerged from it an hour before.

"Who is this Mrs. Macgregor?" Harold asked of his new friend Campbell, as they paced the deck late in the evening. "She seems a very grand little lady."

"And so she is," he answered: "a great deal too grand for me; and as I have nothing to do with Calcutta, I can afford to leave her alone. But people who live there say that she can make all the difference to half the men who come out. If she takes you up and invites you to her house, you are all right, and get asked out everywhere; but if she snubs you, every one else follows suit. I don't know how she manages it, but she is a great deal more like the Queen of Calcutta than any one at Government-house has ever been. She must find it rather different at home. I dare say she was in such high spirits to-day because she felt herself back, as it were, in India. To all intents and

purposes, India begins as soon as we leave Southampton, and Mrs. Macgregor reigns in India. I don't care for that sort of thing myself. I go to India to look after the natives, and Mrs. Macgregor can't hurt or help me much there."

"But who and where is Mr. Macgregor?" inquired Harold.

"Mr. Macgregor is chief partner in Macgregor, Lewes, & Co. You must know the name. It's one of the biggest East Indian firms, and has houses all over the world. The principal one is in Calcutta, and Macgregor is the chief man there, and, of course, very rich. He is a large share-holder and director of the P. and O. besides, which accounts for the captain and people on board having such strict orders to give her the best cabin, and to look after her. However much the ship was crowded, Mrs. Macgregor would be sure of a cabin to herself. I suppose, in a few years, her husband will go home with his twenty thousand pounds a year, or thereabouts. Meanwhile he is working hard in Calcutta, and Mrs. Macgregor has been home for the hot weather, and to get new dresses in the fashion of two years hence. I hear they give wonderful balls; but I don't go in for that style of thing. I sha'n't stop an hour longer in Calcutta than is needed to lay my *dawk;* so Mrs. Macgregor and her airs are nothing to me."

"I never saw any thing like her before," answered Harold. "She is quite a new specimen of her kind to me; but I don't think it will be necessary for me either to make a friend of her. Even if I do go to Calcutta, I mean to eschew all society. I am bent on making a fortune in as short a time as possible; and every thing that is likely to interfere with me there I shall avoid."

And so Harold turned in for the night.

When he awoke in the morning, the steamer was already pitching in the long waves of the Bay of Biscay. A stiff, exhilarating breeze was blowing, and a blue sky and bright sun were overhead. Harold was soon up and on deck, and thoroughly enjoyed his first nautical sensations. Not a lady was to be seen; the deck was almost clear; only a sailor passed occasionally; and here and there a dark ayah, in spotless muslin, crouched in a corner, shivering in the Northern sun. As Harold paced rapidly up and down, he began to think rough weather had its advantages, and that he should rather prefer the days when the ladies were obliged to keep below.

The sea-gulls flew gayly round and round the ship, lightly kissing the white-crested waves as they let themselves fall, and then again mounting strongly and swiftly in the air. Then a shoal of porpoises came by, bounding and jumping from the water as they went, and hurrying on as if they were the very mail itself. The huge engines, too, were worth watching, as they did their work silently and powerfully, and so was the long, white line of foam which the screw of the steamer left behind as she plowed the water, like the trail of a veritable monster sea-serpent. Altogether, Harold began to think that his prospect of a six weeks' voyage was an agreeable one. He had plenty of books with him; there seemed a number of pleasant fellows on board; and he should be able to spend his days in this fine sea-air for some time before the heat began. He was prepared to be happy, and to enjoy the voyage as much as if it had been a mere trip. Of course he was a good sailor; he was very strong in every way; he had never known a day's illness; his nerves and head were as steady after weeks of hard study for an examination as before; and his muscles were as well developed as those of an antique Discobolus. He was a fine specimen of perfect physical, mental, and moral health; and although talented and clever, was not weighted with that disordering element, real or imaginary genius.

After a few talks with Campbell and some other of his fellow-passengers, he came to the conclusion that, as a mine in which to dig for a fortune, he might as well first try India.

"I think you will like it better than the colonies," Campbell said. "I can see the sort of stuff you are made of, and you won't be thrown with such rough fellows as in Australia."

"I can assure you I am quite prepared to rough it," said Harold, who had a dread of being taken for a fine gentleman, and who was so completely convinced he was a gentleman that any hint from others that they looked on him as one, hardly appeared to him as a compliment so much as a simple statement of a fact.

A compliment, to be really welcome, ought always to touch on some merit which in our hearts we have some doubt that we possess. But it never crossed Harold's mind that he was not a gentleman, more than it crosses a Lancashire operative's that he is not a workman. Therefore he would have been far better pleased to be told that he looked like hard work and commercial success than to hear it supposed that he would not like the company of men who were busy over the same task as himself.

"Yes," returned Campbell, "you will have to rough it anyhow, if by 'roughing' you mean being rather uncomfortable. Anyway, as you haven't any capital of your own, I suppose you must be prepared to sit a good many hours at another man's desk, and to take long, hot journeys to fill another man's pocket. But I think in India you are more likely to come across the kind of man whom you would be content to serve. You see, in

India a certain tone is kept up by the services. As a rule, they are filled by gentlemen; and as they are supposed to lead society, commerce has to a certain extent to live up to the same standard of manners, and that kind of thing. Then, too, we haven't any of that real bush life which you find in Australia, and which makes such bears of men."

"I had thought of the diggings as a place where a fortune might be made quicker than in most places," replied Harold. "And as to the company I am likely to meet there, and have to put up with as my only society, I am prepared for that. Since I was a boy, and first made up my mind to try to set my family up in the world again, I have always had before my eyes a rough life and rough company as a certain and necessary evil."

"The diggings are all very well, if you have great luck; but it's simple gambling. I should try India. If it's slower, it's surer. I have known young fellows chance on great luck, too; take the fancy of some man in a big way, and be made a partner for the sake of being sent to some out-of-the-way corner where a man was wanted, and they would not trust an agent. Then by degrees, and sometimes in a very short time, as time is reckoned in the City, they will work their way into the principal house and make large sums. You see, men are always in a hurry to get home from India, and will often leave very large incomes out there for a few thousands at home; and that makes promotion all the quicker for the younger partners. What's the use of stopping out till your health is quite ruined, for the sake of a few thousands a year more?"

"I have a good mind to try India first of all. I have a few introductions. If I see no chance for me, I can but move on next year."

"If you choose to come north-westward, you can have a shake-down with me for as long as you like, and till you find an opening. But you had first better look round you in Calcutta."

"Thanks very much," answered Harold, "I will; and if I can't get a start there, I will make my way to you."

This determination was taken before the *Alexandria* was out of the Bay of Biscay, when she was still tossing and pitching in a rough sea, and the ladies were still hiding their misery in the privacy of their own cabins. Now and then a wan face would make its way on deck and stagger along, holding by ropes and rails till it reached a chair, into which it would subside, and lie hidden and motionless beneath a heap of wraps. But these apparitions were few and far between, and for two or three days the gentlemen had undisputed possession of the deck. This possession was not, however, destined to last long.

CHAPTER XII.

One morning Harold awoke and found dressing was quite easy; his studs did not roll away if he put them down for a moment, and no sudden lurch of the ship caused the button that he was trying to fasten to elude his intention.

They were out of the Bay of Biscay, and, with a smooth sea and a land wind, were making their way along the coast of Portugal. They were not very far from the shore, and could easily see the chestnut-woods which clothed the hills, and were refreshingly green to eyes which even in four days were beginning to tire of nothing but sky and water. The temperature, too, was quite changed; the air was now as mild and balmy as it had been sharp and crisp at starting, and the sun's rays fell brightly and warmly on all.

Here was evidently the state of things which Mrs. Macgregor had announced she should wait for before venturing on deck; nor did she appear singular in her taste, for the cabins were soon emptied, and the deck crowded with chairs. The ladies came up looking rather pale, but in high spirits, the result of reaction from the discomforts of the past days down below, to the bright scene they were now able to enjoy.

Harold felt rather selfishly sorry for the change. He knew none of these women, and did not care to know any, and he preferred their room to their company. He was now driven, with Campbell and a few others who had made up their minds that they were not ladies' men, to the fore part of the ship, and they took up a position with their books and pipes in the sailors' quarters.

Of course, Mrs. Macgregor was not the first to appear; nor did she at length do so without a number of attendants and considerable fuss. First, a steward brought up the news that a sunny corner was to be found for a large and comfortable chair. He was followed by the stewardess with shawls and wraps; then a maid came with a cushion and a smelling-bottle; and lastly appeared the little lady herself, looking as spruce as if she had come out of a bandbox, dressed in another lovely silk, and a hat fit for a croquet-party.

She might have passed several wretched days, but she bore small trace of them. I am disposed to think, however, that she had not been very ill; only, as it was impossible to have her hair dressed, and to go through the process of making an elaborate toilet when there were grave doubts about the equilibrium of her cabin, she preferred not to appear till she could do so in her usual style.

As soon as she was gracefully arranged on her chair, with a beautiful cashmere thrown over her feet, a bevy of men collected round her.

"I hope you are better, Mrs. Macgregor?" inquired the youth she had previously snubbed. "Isn't that bay a horrid nuisance?"

"Who told you I had been ill?" she answered. "And now we are out of it, pray don't mention the bay again."

He was an ugly young fellow in a native regiment, and Mrs. Macgregor was by no means desirous that he should establish himself as a principal member of her court. She liked her immediate circle to be composed of handsome young men of rather higher social standing. Guardsmen, traveling in India for their pleasure, were what she principally affected; and she had a knack of looking on all good-looking military men who were in India without their regiments as Guardsmen; indeed, in her mind, I think the term was as likely to mean a smart young man of fortune, as a man belonging to a particular corps of the army.

"Dear me, how nice this sun is!" she said, holding out a little white hand covered with rings, so that the rays might warm it. "You people who have finished your furlough may grumble, if you like, but I am very glad to be on my road to sunshine once more. I haven't seen it shining so brightly for six months. I got to England in May, and I haven't felt as happy as I do now since then."

"Haven't you, really, Mrs. Macgregor?" said the general. "Well, I have been home eighteen months, and I must say I found England rather a jolly place. We had a capital winter at Bath last year—a ball every Monday in a first-rate room."

"I dare say; but I don't fancy Bath. If you must be in England, I like London, or a big place in the country. Last spring Richard wrote to one of his people in London to take a house for me, and the stupid creature went and got one in Westbourne Terrace; and there, of course, I got very little good society. When we come home for good, I mean Richard to buy me a house in Prince's Gate."

"Well," said the general, "give me Bath or Cheltenham, or some place where one can meet one's old friends."

"There were plenty of old Calcutta people near me in Tyburnia, and yet I had a very stupid summer. No one likes Calcutta better than I do, when I am there; but I don't like India in London—the two don't somehow agree. Are there any London people on board this voyage?"

"I am not sure. I fancy that young Chiltern, with whom Campbell has struck up, must be a London man. I hear he belongs to a very old family, and took high honors at Oxford. He's in neither of the services, so I suppose he's going out to *do* India."

"I don't think it says much for his taste to take up with that Mr. Campbell. Such a man! Neither his head nor his soul can rise above *kutcherry*," said Mrs. Macgregor, who generally felt critically disposed toward those who showed no signs of caring to be numbered among her intimates. "He went back to India with me last time, and during the whole voyage he never spoke a word to me, and rushed off to his jungle the moment we landed."

"Poor fellow! You ought to pity him if he was so near you for six weeks, and yet never found courage to speak to you. It must have been dreadfully tantalizing."

"I sha'n't pity him," she answered. "Fancy wasting feeling of any kind on that gaunt, yellow-bearded Scotchman! But which is Mr. Chiltern?"

From the little she had heard, Harold seemed to be a man she would rather like to know than not.

"That's he, in the gray suit, leaning over the side, with his face this way."

Mrs. Macgregor seemed to examine him critically for a moment.

"He is most distinguished-looking," she said. "Are you sure he's not in the Guards?"

"No; he only left Oxford this summer. He is the son of a man with a place in Wiltshire, I am told."

"If he asks, general, you may introduce him," the lady graciously said; and among his fellow-passengers in this little circle Harold, for the present, was looked on as a wealthy young swell going out to India for his pleasure.

"I say, Chiltern," said the irrepressible youth, Thompson, who, as she took no notice of him, soon found his position near Mrs. Macgregor rather dull, and had left it —"I say, old fellow, Mrs. Macgregor means to take you up; I heard her telling the general he might introduce you to her."

"It's uncommonly kind of her," answered Chiltern.

"And I suspect she means to put me down," continued the youth—"that's to say, if I am green enough to give her a chance."

"You wary child!" laughed Harold. "You are hardly likely to do that, I suppose?"

"Do you think I look like it? No, no, I know a game worth two of that. I know the way to manage that kind of women. Humor them up to a certain point, you know, and then, if they don't run smooth, why, leave them alone for a few days; they are sure to come round in the end. Mrs. Macgregor is inclined to snub me this morning because I asked her how she was, and she does not like me to think she has been sea-sick, so I am off like a shot; and in a day or two she will be fidgeting till she gets me back again. Meanwhile, I am not at all sure it is not much jollier with you fellows at this end of the ship. The women stop a man smoking, you know, and are,

on the whole, a greater nuisance than pleasure."

And, so saying, he settled himself down on the deck between Harold and Campbell.

"I say, old boy," he went on, "when you are introduced, do you mean to make up to Mrs. Macgregor? I think you would find it easy sailing. She would have it you were in the Guards, and a swell, and all that kind of thing. I just tell you, because I think it's doing a fellow a good turn to put him up to the line he ought to take with a woman. It's my private opinion that she would stand a few airs from you, and like you all the better for them."

"It's very good of you, I am sure," returned Harold. "But perhaps when she finds out that I am not in the Guards, and never likely to be, she may take offense at my airs."

A fine lady was hardly more to his taste than she was to his friend Campbell's. In fact, he never thought of women at all, or of women's society, as making any part, however unimportant, of his life. As yet he had never been out in society at all. At Oxford he had not known a single lady. At home, he had first had a boyish friendship for Madge Lifford, and then a deep, strong love for Azalea, which he meant should be life-long; but beyond these two ladies, he had only men acquaintances. Azalea should be his wife as soon as he could afford to have one, and then, with a prospect of one day winning back the Chase, nothing would be wanting to his happiness.

So much being settled, he had no further need to trouble himself about ladies and ladies' society. They would have interfered with his studies and athletics at Oxford, and would be a great hinderance to business in India. Among all his schemes for the future, there had been plenty of visions of hard work, of journeys accomplished in a fabulously short time, of long nights spent in casting up figures, but none of Indian balls and parties, and such-like pleasures; so that he heard without interest or gratified vanity that Mrs. Macgregor, the queen and promoter of them all, so far honored him as to wish for his acquaintance. He never asked to be introduced, and she was disappointed. She did not wish to take the initiative in the matter; but if he continued to show so much indifference, she might be driven to it. He was decidedly the handsomest and most aristocratic-looking man on board; and if he did not care to know her, she did care to know him.

A few days passed. They had stopped at Gibraltar, and the few hours on shore had been enjoyed in a way which only those who escape after a five days' captivity on board a steamer in which they are bound to be re-imprisoned as soon as the few hours are past, can understand; and yet Harold, although he was on good terms with half the men on board, had never mentioned Mrs. Macgregor's name since he had heard of her wish to know him.

"Have you forgotten, general, that I told you I should not mind knowing Mr. Chiltern?" she said, the evening before they were to reach Malta.

"I don't think he's a lady's man, Mrs. Macgregor," the general answered. "He is too much like your pet aversion, Campbell."

"But I am a gentleman's lady," returned Mrs. Macgregor, "and I am sure he is not a bit like that odious Mr. Campbell."

"All right, then, I will introduce him; only don't scold me if you don't find him pleasant."

Harold was busy at the moment arranging to spend the following day lionizing Malta.

"We will have a go-cart together," said Campbell, "and we shall be able to get through every thing in a few hours. First, we will see all there is to be seen in Valetta, and then we will drive out to the Summer Palace."

"I think I will join you," said Thompson, "and then you will be sure not to forget the pickled friars. My brother wrote back last year that they were the sweetest things in the island."

"A go-cart only does for two, Thompson," said Campbell; and then added, in a low voice, to Harold, "We had much better not have him with us; he's just the sort of fellow to make a row in a Catholic church and disgrace us all."

"Chiltern," said the general, approaching at this moment, "come with me a moment. Mrs. Macgregor wishes to be introduced to you."

There was no refusing a point-blank request of this kind; so Harold was carried off, *nolens volens*, to the stern of the ship, and the introduction was duly effected.

Mrs. Macgregor soon cleared a chair of some of her smaller belongings, and Harold had to occupy it, while she did her best to be agreeable with him. To do her justice, when she chose she could be very pleasant. She did not flirt, nor had she any wish that men should be absolutely in love with her. She hated strong feeling of any kind; and if by chance a man was betrayed into the indiscretion of feeling strongly for her, it at once lowered him in her esteem, and she would look on him almost as a bore. But she did like men to think that she was the prettiest and most charming woman of their acquaintance; that talking to her was the pleasantest of occupations; and that her friendship added to their happiness.

Harold could talk pleasantly too. He had no vanity, and never talked for effect; but he was young, bright, and well-informed, too simple and unconscious to be in the least

shy; and what more is needed to make a handsome man a pleasant companion to such a woman as Mrs. Macgregor?

He was such a perfect gentleman, too! Not that he ever did or said any thing that struck one as being particularly gentlemanlike; his manners were far too good to allow of your thinking of them at all. But he had a knack of making other men look a shade less refined when he appeared among them; and when he left Mrs. Macgregor's side, she at once noticed that Captain Romney talked too loud and too much about himself, that Mr. Bateman's movements were brusque and awkward, and that the general's antediluvian compliments were quite odious. I suppose in manner, as in most other things here below, it is the absence of fault, and not the presence of merit, that is to be aimed at. All human perfection is negative; and genius can hardly be better described than the successful avoidance of all mistakes.

"I shall find a carriage at the landing-place as soon as the steamer stops to-morrow," said Mrs. Macgregor, in the course of conversation. "I hope you will come for a drive, Mr. Chiltern. I can show you all that is to be seen in Malta, for this will be the fifth time I have stopped there."

"You are very kind," returned Harold; "but I have just arranged to try what a journey in a go-cart is like with Mr. Campbell."

Mrs. Macgregor was annoyed. She knew quite well that, when they received such an invitation as hers, men could throw over other men without the smallest compunction, if they chose. There was not another man on board, always excepting the hated Campbell, who would not have broken faith with the whole of the passengers for the sake of a drive with her.

She began to think this young Mr. Chiltern was giving himself unpardonable airs. She had gone out of her way to be civil to him; and so far from meeting her half-way, she actually was met by a rebuff at first starting; for to make such an offer and have it refused was to Mrs. Macgregor, so accustomed was she to homage, a decided rebuff. She almost thought that she would trouble her head no more about him. But second thoughts are best. He was the only man on board whom she would care to ask to stop at her house in Calcutta; and she knew enough of the world not to expect to be quite so important a person in the eyes of a young man of property and lineage (for as such she still looked on Harold) as in those of the insignificant youths who were going out to join the native infantry.

So Mrs. Macgregor forgot her annoyance in a few seconds, and with a gracious smile hoped "she was beforehand with Mr. Campbell and his plans for Egypt, and that he would join her party for a trip to the Pyramids, did the time the passengers stopped at Cairo allow of their going." Harold was much obliged, and gladly accepted this second invitation.

"Mr. Macgregor has business friends at Cairo, and they always arrange things for me," explained the lady. "They know how long we may stop, and all about every thing. I have never been able to get to the Pyramids yet; but I mean to try this time; and my husband wrote and told his people to have every thing ready, donkeys saddled and luncheon packed, so that we may lose no time."

"I should so much like to see something of Egypt. I almost wish I had arranged to stop a week there and go on by the next steamer. I suppose they would not let me change now."

"I should think not," answered Mrs. Macgregor, who intended that Harold should go the whole voyage to Calcutta with her. "Besides, it's a horrid place to stop in, unless you have every thing arranged for you by people living there. At the hotels you find it very difficult to get any thing fit to eat. I am sure I hope our hamper may contain nothing but has once seen the inside of Fortnum & Mason's. Their things, even if a month old, are much better than fresh camel stew."

"I don't know about that," answered Harold. "I think it's rather disenchanting to eat a luncheon fit for the Derby on the top of the Pyramids. One could more readily throw one's self into the past, and imagine one's self an ancient Egyptian, after feasting on camel stew and rice."

"I like to romance about feeling like an antique, also," said Mrs. Macgregor. "But I think I like being comfortable better. In fact, I can't do or feel any thing at all if I am uncomfortable; but after an English luncheon and a little Champagne, and with an easy seat, I can imagine myself any thing you choose."

"Under those circumstances, I should think you could not imagine yourself being less than Pharaoh's daughter."

"Well, and a much pleasanter dream than that of being one of those hard-worked Israelite coolies who lived on camel stew and built the Pyramids; and after a native lunch, and seated on a native chair, I could fancy myself nothing else."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day at Malta was soon over. We will not so far trespass on Mr. Murray's province as to attempt any description of its sights. Harold and Campbell had their drive in a go-cart; and Mrs. Macgregor hers in a large barouche and pair, with the gen-

eral at her side, and a couple of young Indian civil servants opposite: and all were back once more on board the *Alexandria*, which would not again stop until she landed her passengers in Egypt.

During these days Harold's behavior was not altogether satisfactory to Mrs. Macgregor. He was very civil, and somehow each day he would find himself drawn into conversation with her; but she could not flatter herself that he showed any eagerness for these chance talks. They generally arose out of some stray word of hers, addressed to him as he passed her seat, or from his being driven to render her some little assistance, the need for which she generally had herself to contrive. Altogether, if he had been an ugly, yellow-bearded Scotchman, he would have been little better in her eyes than Mr. Campbell.

Harold had not the slightest wish to be churlish; but he simply thought very little about the lady, and had no intention whatever of wasting his day in dancing attendance on her. Since he had made up his mind to try and push his fortune in India, he had set to work to learn the language with all the eagerness which he threw into every thing that he took up seriously. Campbell helped him; and he considered mornings spent over Hindoostanee as better employed than they would have been over a backgammon-board with Mrs. Macgregor. This rather annoyed her. She liked him, and being a thorough woman, the less inclination Chiltern showed to be devoted to her, the more determined she became that he should be, and the greater value she attached to any small attention that she could extract from him.

The fourth afternoon from leaving Malta the windmills of Alexandria came in sight. Harold was standing by Mrs. Macgregor, watching the first signs of their approach to Egypt.

"How lucky we are this time!" she said. "We shall be landed sufficiently early to go on to Cairo this evening; and as they say the Marseilles boat can not be in till Thursday, we shall have the whole of to-morrow for the Pyramids, and a night in a comfortable bed to prepare us for the climb."

"Dear me!" said Harold, "do you mean to say that all we shall see of Alexandria will be the road from the wharf to the station? If any one had told me a year ago that I should be there, and yet see no more of it, I should hardly have believed him."

He was, you must remember, fresh from Oxford; his head was full of Clement, Origen, and Athanasius. In his mind Alexandria was associated with the Septuagint and the Apocrypha—with the Gnostics, Neoplatonists, and the cycle of Greek poets; and he mourned the destruction of the Library as a personal loss. He was anxious to study the very spot where the great struggle between Pagan and Christian learning was fought out; he wished to throw himself back, in imagination, to the days when the desert fathers fled from her corrupt society, and when learned women presided in her lecture-halls.

It was rather disenchanting, in the place of being able to visit the past haunts of this heated struggle of learned scholars, to have to make his way straight to a modern railway-station, with this thin-lipped little lady in beautiful clothes. If he could but have fancied her a Pelagia! But no. Pelagia had a sweeter mouth, and did not rely so much on her dress and chignon for her fascinations. Mrs. Macgregor was no doubt more correct in her conduct; but, in his longings for a whiff of the past, if Harold could not imagine himself in the society of an early saint, I think he would almost have been better pleased to summon the ghost of an early sinner than to be obliged to rest in so uninteresting a present.

"Why should you wish to stop at Alexandria?" asked the lady, who on no terms could be taken for Pelagia. "There's nothing in the world to see. I was shown Cleopatra's Needle once, but it was only a great stone. Any one can fancy that without taking the trouble to go and look at it."

Of course Mrs. Macgregor knew little, and cared still less, for past Egyptian learning.

"But think of the associations," said Harold, who was too ignorant of the Mrs. Macgregor genus to know how very little she would care to think of any thing of the kind—"all the deep learning, and thought, and patient investigation of truth of past Alexandria. To this day all students owe its scholars a debt of gratitude for their labors."

"All that old learning has gone to the winds now," said Mrs. Macgregor, who disliked any thing she thought "blue," "and can do nothing better than turn the windmills. Perhaps that's why there are so many of them. All the old learning is drifting about and making a stiff breeze, which they utilize. There! I am sure I have hit on a most practical use for ancient learning in modern days: much better let it stop in the air than cause people to ruin their health by poring over it in their studies."

Harold could only wish for the home party—his father, his uncle, and Azalea. Ah, if Azalea were only here! She knew all about the Alexandrian schools; she could discuss the different parties of disputants; she would have been interested in searching for the very spots where striking scenes had taken place. How could he congratulate himself enough on the luck which had sent into his very home so intelligent and beautiful a woman—a very Hypatia, with

the additional grace and refinement of a Christian?

He almost regretted now that he was bound over to accompany Mrs. Macgregor to the Pyramids. It was evident that neither she nor any of her party were likely to look on them from his point of view. It was the correct thing to *do* the Pyramids, if you had time; and they were a good excuse for a picnic. Maidenhead, and a row on the river, would, of course, have been nicer; but that being out of the question, the Pyramids were better than nothing. Such was her argument, Harold decided.

Mrs. Macgregor liked the pleasure of entertaining in a sumptuous manner, and, since her marriage, had been allowed plenty of money with which she could gratify her taste; so, as she could hardly feast her friends on *paté de foie gras* and unlimited Champagne on board the steamer, she was glad of the opportunity for doing so on landing.

Early in the afternoon the steamer came along-side the wharf, and Harold soon found himself with Mrs. Macgregor in as easy a railway-carriage as if he had been on the Great Western. It was very comfortable, but very disenchanting.

"You may think yourself lucky not to have made this journey a few years ago," said Mrs. Macgregor. "I shall never forget crossing the desert the first time I went to India. Seven of us in a thing they called a carriage. That was before I was married. I have made it a rule since never to be uncomfortable; and the Fates helped me, for the next time I wanted to cross the railway was finished."

"Tastes differ," said Harold. "I would give a great deal for the chance of a ride across the desert on the top of a camel."

"You would not like that much," answered Mrs. Macgregor. "Of all detestable beasts to ride, a camel is the worst. Of course, as you are traveling for pleasure, you will go through any thing and say you like it; but it's a different matter with those who are forced to go out. There's nothing in the world people won't like, if they can fancy it pleasure."

"But do you suppose I am going to India for the fun of the thing?" asked Harold, almost indignantly.

"Well, I don't know that I quite know why you are going out," returned the lady. "You are in neither of the services, and as you look rather grand, I had made up my mind that a tour to India was to be part of your education."

"I am going out to try and make my fortune," said Harold, frankly; "and if any one thinks me a swell, let him mentally add, a very poor one."

"But haven't you a property in Wiltshire?" asked Mrs. Macgregor, interested in hearing at length some authentic information about this man, of whom she wished to make a *protégé*.

"My father has a small place, which just keeps us from starving; but Chiltern passed out of our hands thirty years ago and more. The Chilterns of late have let the world get the better of them; they have got poorer as fast as others have got richer. My aim in going to India is to reverse that; make a fortune, get back the land, and set my family up in the world once more."

What she heard did not diminish Mrs. Macgregor's interest in our hero. A poor cion of an ancient house, bent determinately on raising his family fortunes, was not at all an uninteresting being—altogether different from a Mr. Cox from Manchester, who was trying to create, and not restore, a family.

"Are you the eldest son in your family?" she asked—"the heir of the Chilterns?"

"Yes, I am my father's only son," he answered. "He is only Chiltern of Dillon now; but if hard work can do it, he shall be Chiltern of Chiltern again some day."

By dusk they were established in Shepheard's Hotel, and Harold had enjoyed his first glimpse of Eastern life. He thought it very picturesque; and as he watched the dark figures of every shade, from the black of the Ethiopian to the comparatively fair Arab; the graceful women with hidden faces and black eyes peering curiously through their loop-holes; the donkey-boys, who almost mounted him by force on their sleek, handsome beasts; the picture presented to his brain was a medley confusion of the pastoral chapters of early Jewish history and "The Arabian Nights." When he found his way into the bazaar, mingled with the crowd, and was deafened by the noise, he could only think of Aladdin and Fatima; but then again, in some corner of a coffee-shop, sitting cross-legged, in grave repose, with a long patriarchal beard, Harold's eye would catch sight of a grand-looking old sheik, whose impressive dignity even Abraham could hardly have surpassed; and then "The Thousand and One Nights" would be forgotten in visions from the Book of Genesis.

This view of the East greatly interested him, and, escaping from his fellow-passengers, he wandered on through the city, till he found himself in its outskirts, and palm-trees began to edge the road and cultivated fields to appear. Here again the Book of Genesis came mentally uppermost, and his thoughts were all centred on the early fathers of Israel.

Would it not be well that the Western world should now and then stop its noise and whirl, and cease, but for an instant, to be so terribly like the machinery annex of an exhibition, and study the grave repose of the patriarchs? What a picture do not

the words "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide," bring before our eyes! and how different a picture from the life of our modern, rushing, babbling Gentile world! See the glow in the west. The deep red on the horizon grows paler and paler as it mounts to the zenith, and the gold fades in the deep blue where the stars are beginning to shine; but they come out so gradually one by one, that nothing breaks the peaceful calm of the whole scene.

Isaac watches them imperceptibly becoming more and more numerous, till the promise that his seed shall be as they in number must altogether elude his understanding, though never for a moment does his child-like faith, that so it shall be, waver. He does not doubt—he only wonders. The yellow grows paler, the blue grows deeper, the palm-trees stand out in still more distinct relief against the sky, and the distant purple mountains of Bashan become nearly black. All is as still as the desert; no breeze waves the golden corn in the midst of which he rests; he sinks down on his knees and bows his head to the earth, as he meditates on the wonderful future of the people of God, of whom he is to be the earthly father. Can a patriarch have ever gazed heavenward on a starlit night without the promise of his future greatness coming vividly before him?

His mind can not master the thought, and he is about to raise his eyes heavenward once more, to strengthen his faith, even while increasing the marvel, when they are arrested—and how many of our heavenward glances are arrested by like visions of earthly love! What is this that is breaking the line of the horizon? "And he lifted up his eyes, and behold the camels were coming;" and his heart gave an expectant bound. Here was she by whom he was to form a link in that wonderful future! He went forward to meet her, and "loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

Is it not a more picturesque scene than an heir apparent rushing down to a wharf to meet the steamer which brings him his bride; or stamping up and down the platform of a railway-station, in a vain endeavor to rid himself of some of the superfluous energy of the present day, waiting for the train that is to hurry her into his presence?

Progress, from some points of view, is hardly improvement, Harold thought, as he wandered about, without having his attention distracted by meeting any acquaintances; they were all reposing at the hotel. Mrs. Macgregor was not wrong when she said that traveling undertaken for work or duty is apt to lose in pleasure. Anglo-Indians are so absorbed in the business of the East that its poetry often escapes them; and those who would be ready enough to romance about a castle on the Rhine, pass through Egypt without letting their imagination run riot among the equally romantic features of its history.

The night was still, and the weather so perfect that you forgot even to think of it. Neither heat nor cold occurred to you, than which no higher praise can be given to a climate. The ground was soft, and the peculiar earth smell of Egypt noticeable. Above, the stars were shining; and a crescent moon, sinking in the west, raised the devotion of many a white-robed Mussulman, who, as the sacred symbol caught his eye, bent low, till his turban was on a level with the dusty ground, in devout and picturesque prayer.

Harold wandered about half the night in a trance of delight. He was young enough to feel the keenest enjoyment in this new scene, and, being well read, was able to add to the pleasures of youth those of association and memory. His imagination was powerful, and he could at will bring up such vivid pictures of the history of Egypt, that the country was almost as attractive to him as a scene of his youth; and the past was enjoyed with all the keenness of five-and-twenty, and was enhanced by his power of drawing happiness from all that passed before him in his life's journey.

The noise in the bazaar was hushed, the lanterns were extinguished, the donkey-boys were silenced, and Cairo was asleep, before he remembered that he had promised to join Mrs. Macgregor at breakfast at seven in the morning; and then at length he returned to the hotel and to bed, the luxury of which can only be appreciated by those who have passed fourteen nights in a berth.

CHAPTER XIV.

All were ready and eager to start for the Pyramids in good time next morning. By eight o'clock five or six of the best donkeys in Cairo were ready saddled at the door of the hotel; and Mrs. Macgregor, Harold, two or three fellow-passengers, and the manager of Mr. Macgregor's business at Cairo, who was to act as *cicerone*, mounted, and were soon on their way through the bazaars. The Arabs who carried their luncheon, and were to assist them to climb to the top of the Pyramid, had already started. The morning air was delicious, hardly crisp enough to be called fresh, and the sun shone in a cloudless sky.

We are not often tempted to romance in the early morning in the same way that we feel tempted later in the day. Sunrise suggests action, with sunset comes thought; and to Harold, in his brisk morning temper,

Mrs. Macgregor was more attractive than she had been on the previous evening. She was in high spirits, and was determined to pass a pleasant day, and to do all in her power to make it pleasant to her companions. She was well pleased with the way in which the day began; for as soon as they were out of the crowded thoroughfares of the city, and there was room for two donkeys abreast, chance brought Harold's animal along-side of hers, and they rode together for the rest of the way.

They chatted pleasantly as they rode along, and Harold found the time passing so agreeably that he began to suspect that there was an enjoyment to be found in women's society of which he was ignorant. Campbell had been wrong to prejudice him against this good-natured little woman; and he himself had been rather a prig in thinking his books worth more than any and every opportunity of studying human nature.

After they had ridden *tête-à-tête* for some time, Mrs. Macgregor's tone became slightly more serious as she said,

"I want you, Mr. Chiltern, to talk of your future to me a little. You know you promised to defer all your Old-world associations until after luncheon; so let us look ahead a little. If you think I ask too many questions, and am meddling with what does not concern me, why, you know, you can stop me. But I have been thinking of what you said in the train yesterday. Were you really serious when you talked of trying to make your fortune out in India?"

"Perfectly. I have always intended trying to do so somewhere; and from what I hear, India is not a more unlikely place than any other. I suppose the chances are more than two to one that I shall fail; but I have a sort of idea that somehow I shall in any case be the better for the trial I have made."

"And have you any business introductions?"

"No, not exactly business ones. I have one to a judge in Calcutta, and one to the principal of one of the colleges. But, you see, even in England I did not know what you would call a single regular City man, and so I hardly knew how to set to work to get the kind of introductions I should have liked best."

"I think, perhaps, if you are really serious, and don't mean just to play at being in business, Mr. Macgregor might be of use to you."

She spoke slowly and quite gravely, as if perfectly realizing that, if she procured for him what she half offered, Harold would be on a sure and safe road to success.

Notwithstanding all her affected lightness and actual liking for Guardsmen and handsome military men, Mrs. Macgregor had sufficient practical wisdom to be very far from undervaluing her husband's magnificent business. She never talked of it or its extent; but she fully recognized its importance; and had none of the feeling, not uncommonly found in the fashionable wives of rich business men, of sneering at the source while enjoying the results of their husbands' wealth. She had known comparative poverty before her marriage; and now, when she was surrounded by almost boundless wealth, was too sensible to depreciate its prosaic origin, or to imagine that her Paris dresses dropped from the clouds, or that her husband had the power of coining money.

At these words it flashed across Harold's mind for the first time what a friendship with Mr. Macgregor's wife might possibly bring forth. Such an introduction would really be a successful first crack in the nut he was bent on opening. He had been ready to back his luck to some extent; but such a beginning would be almost beyond his most sanguine hopes.

"I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Macgregor could be of all the use in the world to me," he answered, "nor have I any more doubt that I am really in earnest. But, unfortunately, there's something more needed—Mr. Macgregor's good-will. What possible claim have I on it?"

"I dare say you haven't any claim; but you come to us in Calcutta, and Mr. Macgregor will talk to you, and be able to put you up to what is best for you to do. I know he likes having dealings with gentlemen much better than with the ordinary run of business men. Where are you going when we get to Calcutta?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought much about that. I suppose there are hotels."

"Yes, of course there are hotels, but they are uncomfortable places, and nobody one knows ever stops at them. You come to us, and we will take care of you. You don't know how thankful people are in India to any one who will come and stop with them; and the longer they stop, the better they like it."

"You are very kind," answered Harold, "so kind that I hardly like to accept your offer. Why, Mr. Macgregor has not even an idea of my existence. How can I go to you at once as your guest?"

"What a griff Indians would call you," laughed Mrs. Macgregor. "If people were all so ceremonious, and never went to one another's houses till they were intimate, they would often have to wait a long time. I can introduce you to my husband, and I flatter myself my introduction will do just as well as that of some business correspondent whom we neither of us have ever seen, and who sends us his wife's fifth cousin to entertain. We really often have people we know no more of in our house, and like having them, too."

"I am afraid I don't understand much about Indian society; but you seem very hospitable."

"Yes, of course we are what is called hospitable, but there's very small merit in that. People who have good incomes and very little society are apt to be hospitable. Selfishness is at the bottom of it in India as it is in Scotland, or rather *was*, before Cook began taking his people the Caledonian Tour," said Mrs. Macgregor, who at times could take a very literal view of things. "The greatest kindness you can show to people in India is to stop at their houses and help them to get through the day pleasantly; and if you will come to us, we shall both look on it as a kindness."

Nothing could be more flattering; and Harold, his scruples thus removed, gladly accepted Mrs. Macgregor's invitation.

By this time they were nearing the Pyramids, but Mrs. Macgregor's conversation, even more than her commands, had given a forward rather than a retrograde impulse to Harold's thoughts. His star seemed rising. He would indeed be favored by fortune should he succeed in interesting Mr. Macgregor in his future, simply because he had had the luck to come out in the same steamer with his wife.

From this point of view, Mrs. Macgregor appeared more and more charming, and Mr. Campbell more than ever in the wrong. Mrs. Macgregor, as a fellow-passenger and an organizer of a picnic to the Pyramids, was altogether a different person from Mrs. Macgregor looked on as an introduction to the house of Macgregor, Lewes, & Co.; and as such, for the moment, she was the most prominent object in Harold's thoughts. As it had not occurred to him to pique Mrs. Macgregor into taking an interest in him by his indifference, so neither now did the idea strike him that his indifference had produced that effect. He was too simple and unused to women to think of such a cause and such result. This consciousness is the exclusive property of the youth Thompson kind, who, at one-and-twenty, believe themselves to have mastered all the intricacies of the feminine character.

Had Mrs. Macgregor shown the slightest disposition to flirt with him, Harold's instinct would have at once forced him, although he might hardly have understood why, to draw back, and avoid the slightest risk of accepting the husband's good-will as a reward for attentions paid to the wife. But Mrs. Macgregor was too clever to flirt. She was quick at taking her tone from her companions; and a pleasant friendship was all she wished to establish with Harold.

She was a clever woman, to whom the study of men was more interesting than that of books. She had no children, and few occupations; but she prevented her life from being dull by every variety of intercourse with her gentlemen acquaintances, always excepting that she never willingly allowed a man to go beyond the bounds of friendship. Her husband, who was considerably older than herself, simply worshiped the ground on which she walked. He trusted her implicitly; and the greater was the number of men that gathered round her, the better pleased and the prouder he felt. He never denied her any thing; and in return she was a good wife to him, faithful and true—always looking graceful and pretty at the head of his table, attentive to any business acquaintance, however uninteresting, if it was his wish that she should be attentive, and altogether playing the part of wife to a merchant-prince to perfection.

The Pyramids were climbed, and at the top they found the luncheon already spread. As Mrs. Macgregor had made up her mind to make the exertion of mounting between two and three hundred steps, each two or three feet high, she was bent also on going through her task gracefully and well. With the aid of two stalwart Arabs, each upward mount was therefore made with ease, and was the subject of special care. Although no one might be looking, she never once made an awkward step on to the platform above her. She certainly had great capacity for taking pains. The thought, "It does not matter to-day, or for such a set of people," was a temptation she never allowed to affect her; and her reputation as a woman of elegance may have been the result. If she was going a journey, or dining *tête-à-tête* with her husband, or simply sitting alone in her boudoir, her dress would always be perfect, and her movements graceful and studied.

No doubt, taking so much trouble for a result which, after all, was very inferior to the unstudied and simple harmony of every movement that Azalea made, would have been a great bore to most persons. But she never allowed it to be so to her, for she fully recognized that, as she had not been gifted with the perfect beauty which could dispense with art, she had better avail herself of every incidental means at command to enhance her attractions.

"Well, all I can say is, that I don't envy the Hebrew who had to bring up the last stone for this pyramid," she said, as she sat down cool and unflurried, on the rug prepared for her on the top. "I have found it quite hard work enough to carry myself up."

What a view it was which lay at their feet, and over which their eyes could wander, the horizon being hardly more confined than if they had been in the centre of the ocean: the golden desert or fertile plain jotted here and there with palm groves, the minarets of Cairo in the distance, the tombs, the Sphinx at their feet dwarfed

into comparative insignificance by the height they were above it, and the tawny Nile flowing quietly on. But I won't say more; descriptions of scenery are, like descriptions of pretty faces, apt to be wearisome. Few things can give us greater pleasure than to see either; but the senses ill bear to replace one another; they do each other's work as awkwardly as if they were Indian servants. What ought to be enjoyed by the eye becomes tedious when only heard by the ear, and I will not force my readers to listen to a description of that which ought to be seen.

Luncheon was spread, as I have said, and Mrs. Macgregor was duly attended to. She neither gave herself the airs, nor did she take the trouble, of a hostess. There was a grand luncheon, with good wine, provided at her expense; but she treated it as if she had stumbled on it by accident, or as if some munificent genii had spread a feast for the whole party, who were not slack to enjoy it.

When they reached Cairo again in the evening, they found the Marseilles passengers had just arrived, and that the united forces from the two steamers were to cross the desert to Suez early on the following morning.

I do not purpose to follow our travelers through all the incidents of the overland route: all I will say shall be, that the voyage was prosperous, that no accidents befell them, and that by the middle of December Harold was admiring the verdant banks of the Hoogly, as the steamer made her way up one of the many mouths of the Ganges, in Calcutta.

Since Egypt, the friendship between Mrs. Macgregor and Harold had grown apace; and even Campbell owned that, if it was to result in an introduction to her husband, Mrs. Macgregor, notwithstanding her airs and graces, was not to be despised. He was rather a hard Scotchman of the John Knox type, and inclined to take the severest view of all that could be described as frivolous, if frivolity led to neither business nor profit. When frivolity leads to either, Scotchmen are by no means less willing than other people to condone it. So Harold, being subject to no counter-influence, spent most of the time that was not engrossed with his books in sitting by and chatting with Mrs. Macgregor, or rather in listening while she talked to him. He did not at all neglect his reading or study of Hindoostanee. If Mrs. Macgregor was to help him, so also would a knowledge of that language; he would not neglect the one for the other; and when it is simple *friendship* that tries to seduce us from our studies, we can generally resist her wiles.

At length the steamer stopped, and boats, with expectant friends, put off from the wharf. Husbands came on board to reclaim their wives, and fathers to greet daughters whom they had not seen since they were in long clothes, and sons who were about to enter on the careers which for themselves a few years would close. If the partings at Southampton are heart-rending, the meetings, years after, in Calcutta, are hardly an equivalent joy. You may grieve for the loss of a fine boy of four, who has managed somehow to twine himself round your heart, and yet not rejoice in the same degree when a strapping youth of nineteen, who must be pointed out before you recognize him, accosts you with, "Ah! then you are my governor;" and, after a few days' intercourse, vanishes once more up country, and for the future looks upon you merely in the light of a rich and generous banker.

Harold stopped below, not caring to be an unwelcome witness of these family greetings. Most of the passengers had some one to meet them, and each was so preoccupied as to be unconscious of the others; but Harold, being expected by none, would have felt as if he were watching them all. He was, however, soon summoned by the steward, in whose eyes such a call gave him fresh importance: Mr. Macgregor was asking for him.

After her husband's welcome, and when he proposed that they should go on shore, proudly happy at recovering his wife, and finding that she looked more attractive than ever after her change, Mrs. Macgregor had merely said,

"Richard, there's a young Mr. Chiltern on board, whom I have asked to come and stop with us. Had we not better take him with us in our boat?"

"By all means, if he's to be found. We can take him home in the carriage, as I came down in the barouche."

Harold, of course, obeyed the summons at once, and was introduced to a gentlemanlike man who, to his English eyes, looked fully sixty years of age. As a fact, Mr. Macgregor was not fifty; but Harold did not yet know how to discriminate between a face worn by climate and one worn by years.

"We had better land, I think, Mr. Chiltern," he said. "My wife tells me you have kindly promised us your company for a while."

He spoke kindly and courteously, and Harold began to think that Indian society promised well. Here was a man of enormous wealth, and to whom he was quite unknown, welcoming him to his house before he had set foot on Indian soil.

"Mind how you step into the boat, Mr. Chiltern," was Mrs. Macgregor's warning as he went down the ladder; "they say, if you fall into the Hoogly, there's no chance of your ever getting out again."

"I will take care, though I feel half inclined to try my swimming powers in these strong currents."

"You had better not," said Mr. Macgregor: "the under-currents are really so powerful as to conquer even a champion swimmer."

They soon landed, and Harold was invited to seat himself in a handsome, well-appointed open carriage, and was driven at a quick pace across the large open green that serves as airing-ground to Calcutta. The mere mention of an open carriage implies that the sun was setting; for even in December no one ventures to brave the rays of the afternoon sun.

We have all heard of the luxury of Indian life, and Harold did not think that report exaggerated the reality when he was housed with the Macgregors. But externals made little impression on him; and though easily able to dispense with comforts, he had rather a grand way of taking all this Indian splendor as a matter of course. Mr. Macgregor showed some signs of intending to befriend him, though for a few weeks he did nothing beyond talking to him, and sending him out driving with his wife. But the merchant was, nevertheless, sounding his guest all the time, and marking with approval the zeal with which Harold studied the language with his *moonshee*, and the general aptitude he showed in conversation.

At length one morning, to be marked forever with a white cross in Harold's life, Mr. Macgregor employed him on some small matter in the office. That was Harold's first stroke of business; and having seen him make a beginning with the small end of the wedge, we will leave him for a while, quietly and zealously working for Macgregor, Lewes, & Co., and with good reason to hope that before that November afternoon on which Madge Elliot had startled Azalea in the far-away library at Dillon, he will have succeeded in making himself very useful to them.

CHAPTER XV.

The Liffords reached London on a fine April evening, and drove at once to their house in Hill Street.

Lady Margaret was a tall, high-bred-looking woman, without very much beauty, but with a graceful and dignified bearing. Strangers were apt to think that her manner was rather repellent and awe-inspiring, though the idea of raising such feelings never occurred to her. She really was humble-minded and free from every thought of self-assertion; but her reserve was great, and, from her manner and appearance, those to whom she was little known generally decided that it was the result of pride.

Madge had undoubtedly been a trial to her mother, and that from an early age. Her habits of scouring the country on every horse—good, bad, or indifferent—that she could find, and of walking for miles over the downs, and coming home with a complexion that would have become a farmer's daughter; the entire want of reserve in her manner of expressing herself, and the total absence of the sense that all she might hear or read was not matter for conversation—all this was far from being what Lady Margaret could approve of in her daughter. She herself never cared for more exercise than a walk on the terrace at Chiltern, or for more air than she could enjoy in taking a quiet drive. In her youth it would have been considered unfeminine to tear over the country in the way that suited Madge's taste.

Even her daughter's painting, too, might have been of so much prettier and more lady-like a description. Lady Margaret had herself been considered clever in flower-painting on screens; but those were very different from Madge's bold sketches of dogs, horses, and cattle. And, then, Madge could never be induced to attend to her embroidery, or to needle-work of any kind.

All this was sad, and the natural prelude to an elopement. If you cease to be feminine in your occupations, Lady Margaret argued from her experience, you soon cease to be feminine in your conduct. She loved her daughter, notwithstanding, very warmly. She was of too affectionate a nature not to love all with whom she was much thrown in contact, and these were few in number, as her family circle was small, and her shyness prevented her from making many intimate friendships.

When Madge came home to her mother, unhappy and almost desperate, she was taken in with loving sympathy. Perhaps the two years that followed were those in which the mother enjoyed the greatest pleasure she ever experienced in her daughter. As I said before, Madge was subdued by her husband's death. She was now docile and tractable with her mother, and they lived alone together, peacefully happy, in a lovely villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. The beautiful flowers of the Riviera almost tempted Madge to paint them, and she was even occasionally seen with a needle in her hand. Altogether, she was softened in tone and manner, and she clung to her mother, as if in her shelter lay the only haven from the storms that surrounded her outside.

But this change was not to last. In time Madge's nature re-asserted itself. Her interest in horses, both to ride and paint, revived; her longing for gayety and society returned; and poor Lady Margaret began to look forward to a simple repetition of all the trials she had undergone in Madge's

girlhood. From such a vision she turned to Azalea with pleasure. Indeed, by the time she reached England she had almost become frightened of her strong-willed, impetuous daughter, and was as grateful as Madge, though on different grounds, for the society of a quiet girl like Azalea. There was a gentle refinement about the latter that was very attractive to her. She was never overheated and flushed, nor violent and excited in her way of talking; but was more nearly like Lady Margaret's picture of a lady of high birth than her own wayward daughter. Although she had always lived in it, Lady Margaret was still very innocent in many of the ways of the world, and with difficulty believed harm of any one. She had failed to notice the cold looks of friends which, the year before, had made the quicker-eyed Madge wince; and, without *arrière pensée*, she welcomed the friendship between Azalea and her daughter as a happy sign that the latter was beginning to choose society of which she could approve. For her own sake, too, she was glad to have this lovely young girl with them, and as Azalea had expressed no wish to ride in the park, she looked forward with pleasure to having her as a companion in her usually solitary drives; and if she would not insist on stopping too late at balls, Lady Margaret could even anticipate pleasure in taking her into society.

Azalea was half bewildered with the noise and bustle of London which she encountered on her way from the station to Hill Street. The mere multitude of houses was a source of wonderment to her, so totally unused was she to cities.

"And each of these houses contains a family!" she said, musingly, as they drove through street after street.

"Of course they contain a family," said Madge, laughing, "unless they happen to be let in lodgings to single men."

"I shall never be able to take in so much life. There, look, even in this one street I see 103 on a door. Fancy one hundred and three different sets of people, and each one with their different interests, and hopes, and fears, and aims!"

Azalea spoke almost solemnly. She felt like an explorer when he suddenly realizes the extent of the ruin he is unearthing. From being daily in the midst of it, the vastness of modern London hardly produces so strong an impression on us as the greatness of ancient cities; but the size of the town and the multitude of its inhabitants came upon Azalea's unsophisticated mind like a fresh discovery, and she was half awe-struck by its greatness.

"But we do not visit at all these houses, my dear," said Lady Margaret. "In fact, I suppose, I hardly know by sight one of the people whose houses we have passed; particularly on this side of the park," she added, quite simply.

"That only makes it the more wonderful to me," answered Azalea. "It's like waking up suddenly in a garden full of flowers about which you know nothing at all, either what they are or where they come from. Human beings are of all things in the world the most interesting; and here, from their very number, you can know nothing of most of them."

"Don't begin to philosophize," broke in Madge. "We should hardly come to town if there were not more people in London than at Chiltern. Have you only just taken that in, you foolish child?"

"Of course I knew it before; but it seems to strike me so much more forcibly now, when I actually see all the houses."

"Well, you need not look so solemn because you find the report that London is a big place an actual fact; though, by-the-way, solemnity suits you better than it does most people. Azalea looks well when she's deeply in earnest, doesn't she, mother?"

"She is always in earnest, I think, my dear," replied Lady Margaret. "Not like you, Madge. I never feel sure if you really mean what you say or not."

"Ah, my dear mother, I find it rather convenient that you should be in doubt sometimes. If I change my mind after having committed myself, it's sometimes very useful to fall back on the supposition that I was joking all the time. You see, I talk so much and so fast that some escape from the consequences of what I may have said is often really necessary to me."

That Madge should so frankly own to her faults, and yet never show any inclination to mend them, was a thing Lady Margaret could not understand. In her youth, she had been taught that the first step toward amendment was the owning our faults. This first step, Madge, to do her justice, never showed any backwardness in taking; but by this time Lady Margaret had given up all hope of seeing it followed by the practically more important step, number two.

Hill Street was at length reached. Lady Margaret's house was not a large one, and contained only two moderately sized rooms on a floor, which looked back and front, and were connected by folding-doors, after the manner of ninety-nine out of every hundred London houses.

Madge, who, as I have said, was by way of being an artist after the Landseer school, used the back dining-room for both studio and snuggery: here her big dog lived, and her riding-whips, and such-like paraphernalia were kept. This big dog was a great source of terror to the gentle Lady Margaret. She lived in constant dread of seeing

her little snowy Maltese devoured by the huge mastiff, who, though very good-tempered, certainly looked the most ferocious of beasts. Lady Margaret would gladly have banished the dog; but when her wishes ran counter to Madge's, they were seldom accomplished.

Madge's first thought on alighting from the carriage was to take possession of all the cards on the hall table, and to examine critically the names of those who had already called.

"Come in and see my room, Azalea," she said, "and we will look over these cards. We will come up to you, mother, as soon as tea is ready. This is my snuggery," she continued, as they entered her room. "There's a picture I painted of Felicity before I was married. Dear old horse, I hope he's safe at Paddington by this time. Now let us look at the cards; they ought to interest you, Azalea. Are you not rather anxious to know where your first ball is to be?"

"I think I have hardly yet fully realized that I am going to be taken to balls. I am in such a whirl already, I can hardly take in any thing."

"What! not got over the houses yet?" said Madge, looking over the cards. "Ah, here it is, as I hoped. Aunt Marian is going to give her ball, as usual, at the beginning of the season. She brings out a plain daughter every two years; there are three out already, and now it's Letitia's turn. She gives a real grand ball for each fresh girl, and a little dance the alternate years. You shall appear first at Letty's ball. You can hardly have a better introduction."

"Which is your Aunt Marian, Madge?"

"Why, Lady Burne. Lord Burne is my mother's brother. They have a capital house in Berkeley Square, with a grand room for dancing in it. You may take to the girls, but I think them dreadfully insipid. Letty's not a bad little thing; and when you get tired of being in-doors, you can go and sit in the Square garden with her."

"And when is the ball?" asked Azalea, not without some interest.

"To-morrow week. I will take you round and show you to the girls in the morning. They are sure to fall in love with you; and Aunt Marian will always speak of you as 'my niece's beautiful friend.' They are too decidedly plain to dream of being jealous, and go in for admiring beauty immensely. Here are plenty of people to call on, you see: you will be quite a godsend to mother when she's returning all these cards. I can't stand driving; and she has always had to go the afternoon rounds by herself. You pretty, pretty thing," Madge went on, throwing her arms round her friend in great glee, having been suddenly sent into very high spirits by receiving the invitation she wished for, "what a lucky thought it was of mine to bring you up with us!"

Azalea's town life now began, and she soon found herself in the full swing of a London season. She was introduced, in the first instance, to Madge's cousins and other relations, and then, from them, into the wider circle of general society.

As she had promised, the morning after their arrival Madge took her to make friends with the Burne family.

"I have brought round my new friend, Miss Chiltern, aunt," she said, as they entered the handsome drawing-room in Berkeley Square, where Lady Burne was sitting with her daughters — the Ladies Cecilia, Agnes, and Beatrice Follett, all tall, plain but lady-like-looking girls, with yellow hair, and fair, freckled complexions. "She is going to spend the season with us in Hill Street. But where's Letitia? I want to see how she looks, now she has come out."

"Letitia has still to read with mademoiselle in the morning," answered Agnes; and then, as her mother was engaged in talking to Azalea, whispered, "Only fancy, Madge, your starting a young lady friend!—you who would never care as you ought even for your own cousins. How *did* she manage to make you grow fond of her?"

Poor Agnes's idea of happiness was a warm friendship with Madge, for whom she entertained a great admiration. How could she help thinking much of one who always had the right answer ready, who was never afraid to speak out her mind, and whom nothing could subdue, and nobody could render insignificant?

"We have been all the winter together down at Chiltern," answered Madge; "and then, just look at her face! Isn't her beauty enough to make any one fall in love with her?"

"Dear me, yes. How pretty she is! I don't wonder that you like to have her with you. And does she sit in your painting-room, and all that?"

"Yes; our friendship just now is quite red-hot, so it's no use your being jealous, Aggy. If you are good, I will send her round to sit in the garden with you sometimes."

"Oh, do please! And may she come to Letty's ball?"

"I should like her to come out at it. She has been nowhere yet; and I really think she would be as great an ornament to a ball-room as an extra hundred plants."

"Letty will be delighted. She's thinking so much about her ball that she drives mademoiselle almost wild with her inattention; and now, when she hears that she is to have a new beauty at it, she will be worse than ever."

"Poor little Letty!" said Madge. "I

wouldn't stand any more French readings when I was out, if I were she."

"Ah, Madge, you can manage somehow not to stand what you dislike, but none of us can," said Lady Agnes, with a sigh. "Cecilia is trying it on now: she ran up a bill at a book-shop by way of being independent, and there was *such* a fuss the other day. I don't know what she will do next. I think, perhaps, if we had allowances, that might help us; but mamma likes dressing us herself best. You know Cecilia is as old as you are, and ought to have her own way sometimes—don't you think so?"

"If she's waited all this time, I fear there's not much chance of her getting it now," answered Madge, laughing. "The very first word I ever said was a 'no,' and so I early established a right to an opinion of my own. Is there much going on now?"

"Yes; they say the season is going to be a very good one. Are you going to chaperon Miss Chiltern?"

"Mother and I together mean to give her as much gayety as she wishes for. But she's not like you silly girls, caring for nothing but balls. She won't find it difficult to stick to her books, in spite of Letty's ball."

Lady Burne and her two other daughters meanwhile were talking to Azalea: her beauty predisposed them all to take an interest in her, and she rather felt as if she were being taken possession of by the whole family.

"They are good, kind people," said Madge as they left the door, "but rather bores; a little of them goes a long way, I always find. I am glad, however, my aunt was properly grateful to me for giving her house the honor of your first appearance."

This way of talking was still mysterious to Azalea. She had not yet mastered the fact that her beauty would cause others to put a high value on her company, nor realized the important place it would give her in society.

"And now," said Madge, "I am going to paint for a couple of hours: you can bring your books into my room, and we shall be perfectly quiet. I suppose Mr. Purvies told you not to neglect your reading while you were in London."

"Yes; I promised him not to idle away my mornings."

Madge attired herself in a brown-holland blouse, that covered her completely, and she was soon before her easel, busy drawing her dog Cæsar's fine head.

In the afternoon Madge rode, and Azalea went out driving with Lady Margaret.

"I am glad, my dear," said the latter, as they seated themselves in the open carriage, "that you do not object to driving, as Madge does. I shall enjoy my afternoon drive so much more, now it is not a solitary one."

"Dear Lady Margaret, it is so kind of you to have me with you!" answered Azalea.

She was beginning to be very fond of her friend's mother, and even sometimes to prefer her society to Madge's. If she was not equally amusing, she never jarred against good taste in the way the latter was constantly doing.

They drove off through streets and squares, now and then stopping to leave cards at the house of some acquaintance —which appeared to Azalea's unsophisticated mind the oddest way of seeing your friends — and at length turned into the park, where already a long string of carriages was slowly, and all but noiselessly, wending its way up and down the drive.

Seeing all the people, and the beautiful horses and carriages, was a great amusement to Azalea, and the quiet stillness of it all was not the same trial to her lymphatic nature that it was to Madge's mercurial one. She rested back in the carriage, looking as much like a beautiful marble statue as like a fashionable young lady; and by the second time the carriage had made the round, the gray liveries and somewhat old-fashioned blue baroncho were being watched for eagerly by more than one group of dandies, who were leaning over the railings airing their lovely kid gloves.

"She's with Lady Margaret Lifford," said Kit Selwyn. "Come round to the Row with me, Robin. I saw Mrs. Elliot riding with some of the Follett girls. She's always glad to speak to a fellow, and will tell us who she is. By Jove, how yellow she makes half the girls look!"

"The regiment quartered at Knightsbridge is already wild about you, I am sure, Azalea," said Madge, as she came into the drawing-room in her habit after her ride.

"I am sorry they have nothing better to be interested in," said Azalea, quietly.

"But you oughtn't to be sorry for any thing of the kind. Sir Christopher Selwyn and three others came across such a muddy bit of road (I am sure the watering-cart must have stopped there ten minutes), and only just to ask me who was driving with my mother. They didn't say any more— only just asked the question; but when men of that stamp dirty their boots just to say how do you do to me, I know they are really interested in what they come to ask."

"I wish, my dear Madge, you would not talk in that way," said her mother. "If these officers whom you mention are gentlemen, of course they would wish to speak to you on your arrival in town."

"So few men in these days are what you would consider gentlemen, mother," returned Madge. "They greet one with a sort of nod, very much like what they would give

to a messmate, and think one ought to be very much obliged for the attention. But, as to coming through the mud to speak to me—I am afraid their civility seldom equals their dislike to dirty boots."

"Please, then, don't let me know such people," said Azalea. "I think a man who is not a gentleman must be so unpleasant—at least, to meet in a drawing-room. There were some delightful men in the cottages at Dillon; but that was different; and perhaps, after all, some of those were real gentlemen. But do you mean to say that men in London are frightened of dirtying their boots?"

"Well, of course, they don't like doing it in the park, though, to do them justice, few of them mind wading through a bog if it's after grouse."

After this the days followed one another quickly, and each in its ordering was much the same as the one that preceded it. A walk, seldom farther than the Square garden, in the morning, and a drive in the afternoon; a few hours of study, and now and then a singing-lesson: such was Azalea's day.

The garden seemed the resort of many young ladies, who wanted a little air and exercise in the morning, and Azalea soon made friends with a number of youthful admirers.

Girls are seldom prevented by jealousy from cordially appreciating beauty, as men seem to fancy; and they are often more ardent in their admiration of a lovely face than men—always excepting those who happen to have fallen in love with it.

Girlish society was a novelty to Azalea; and as she had not in her nature a shade of the arrogance which leads some to think contemptuously of those intellectually below them, she was able to enjoy it. She had a strong feeling that it was always best to take people for what they are, and not for what they are not; some were clever and some not; some earnest and some frivolous; but they were all human beings, and as such they and their tastes interested her. Even with her small experience she began to suspect, too, that, in all but saints, the law of compensation held good in character and talent, and that you would discover it if you only studied each individual long enough.

Her deeply religious nature saw God's hand even in the silly girls who chattered in the Square garden; and her faith was sufficiently strong to believe that in them lay the possible germs of lives as high and holy as that of her ideal, Mr. Purvies. The great fault of being mainly interested in the "superior" half of humanity was no temptation to her; and, as a result, her sympathies were large and wide. She took all that came before her very quietly, and, from the long solitary years she had passed, was little used to enlarging on her own feelings. Though she gently joined in the talk around her, she never made herself the centre of conversation, as Madge did the moment she appeared on the scene. We are so likely to overlook what never forces itself on our attention, that, had it not been for her beauty, Azalea might have gone through the world comparatively unnoticed.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HERE'S your dress, Azalea," said Madge, coming into the room with a long flowing robe, that looked as if one of the light fleecy clouds that were flitting across the April sky had come down in the shape of a ball-dress. "I was determined you should have a dress from a really good milliner for your first ball; so you must take it, and wear it, and thank me by looking your very best this evening."

"Oh, dear Madge, how kind you are! Are you really going to give me this beautiful white, snowy-looking dress? I had not thought about what I was to wear this evening."

"No, you little goose, I know you haven't. I have been laughing at you ever since we heard of this ball. Just fancy what you would have done if I had not had a practical head on my shoulders! I intended to have given you a good fright this evening by coming to you when mother and I were both ready and waiting, and asking you what you were going to wear; but as Décon sent it home this morning, I could not resist bringing it to you at once."

"I must think more," said Azalea, rubbing her forehead. "It is so selfish of me to let you take all the trouble in every way for me. But I have been so busy the last few days trying to understand how it was that Leverrier was able to discover Neptune by simple mathematics. When I am only told facts, and have not worked them out for myself, they seem so merely on the surface of my mind that I can't rest content until I have followed all the reasoning. When I get some idea of the astronomer's calculations, I shall feel very differently about the planet."

"But I won't have you hurt your eyes by poring too much over figures," said Madge. "Neither girls' eyes nor their complexions will stand being played pranks with—they are far too easily damaged. There was poor little Violet Luttrel, who got a High-church fit the first year she came out, and took to fasting with such a vengeance in Lent that her complexion has never been the same since. The small-pox could hardly have

done her a worse turn than that attack of piety."

"How can you, Madge!" exclaimed Azalea, indignantly. "Putting the rules of the Church in comparison with a pink-and-white complexion!"

"Don't ride your high horse, Azalea! There are a great many opinions about the rules of the Church; and I should be very sorry for a girl to hurt her looks by taking up with the wrong one. Just fancy, how annoyed she would be when she found out her mistake!"

"What have looks to do with it?" asked Azalea, rather literally.

"Oh, I know quite well my view won't stand arguing about; only, from experience, I think it's wiser for girls, before they are married, not to indulge in any ideas that may injure their good looks. If you want a problem, find out for me what, given the size of my frizette, will be the size of my chignon; but you sha'n't pore over these calculations any more. I don't want you to have red eyes, as I mean you to look perfectly lovely to-night."

This Azalea certainly did. Though admiring her at all times, both Madge and her mother were surprised to see how very beautiful she looked when dressed. Her dark auburn hair was coiled very simply round her head. Madge had fastened on one side a bunch of natural white azaleas; a necklace, composed of several rows of pearls—the only ornament she had inherited from her mother—fitted closely round her column-like throat; and the long flowing white dress completed a picture that any chaperon might feel proud of introducing even to the critical society of London.

"My dear," said Lady Margaret, as she entered the drawing-room, "it is quite a pleasure to take you out."

"You look fit to be Empress of Russia!" exclaimed Madge. "There, mother, never say again that I don't know what's what. You would never have thought of bringing this living Greek statue to London if I had not suggested it."

"May I stop by you, Lady Margaret?" said Azalea, as they mounted Lady Burne's staircase, which, notwithstanding its being very wide, was so crowded as to make the ascent to the drawing-room a long business. She felt quite bewildered by the number of strange faces by which she was surrounded, with many of whom Madge had already exchanged greetings.

"There's no fear of my being neglected this evening," she whispered, as their heads met in the crowd. "All the best men in the room will be wanting to be introduced to you, and mother half frightens them, and so they will have to come to me."

"I should not think you were often neglected, Madge," said Azalea.

"I don't think I am; but it makes a considerable difference who it is that pays me attention. There are a lot of stray men from Aldershot and the public offices, who only get into this kind of houses for balls, because people must have enough men for the girls to dance with; and I can always have any number of them in my train. But that's not the stamp of man I mean you to know. I sha'n't introduce you to any one whose *raison d'être* is merely to form part of the *corps de ballet*. Quality, not quantity, is what I shall look for in your partners."

If Madge adhered to this resolve, the young men of quality must have been largely represented that evening; for introduction followed introduction so fast that Azalea soon lost count of numbers, and hardly knew by the end of the evening with whom she was acquainted and who were strangers to her.

Madge occasionally joined her for a minute, either to present a friend, or to tell her that the ball was a great success, and that it was half her doing.

"You will see that we shall get a card tomorrow for the ball at Waltham House on Friday," Madge said. "The duchess has just asked to be introduced to mother. I have never been to her house, and have always so wished to get there."

At this moment Azalea was claimed by her partner; and a tall, strikingly refined, and good-looking man accosted Madge.

"What, Reginald, you here!" she said, with surprise. "I thought you were still at St. Petersburg."

"No; I got tired of the work, and thought I might as well come home for the summer. Milman is military *attaché* there now, and I think he will keep the place longer than I did."

"You are as lazy as ever," answered Madge, smiling, and looking up into his handsome, high-bred face.

"No, I am not. I have just made up my mind to a great exertion. I want you to introduce me to your cousin."

"She is not my cousin, to begin with; and I am sure I shall not introduce her to any one who seems to think it's rather a trouble than otherwise to know her. Did you ever see a more lovely face?"

"She is certainly very handsome. So you don't mean her to know any one who shows no signs of becoming eagerly excited over the introduction. Come, Madge, that's rather hard on men of naturally quiet dispositions, like mine."

"Well, if you really think it's a serious hardship not to know her, I may perhaps relent. But she's too good and beautiful to be even looked at by half you good-for-nothing London men."

"I can't so far change my habits as to dance with her; but I really should like to take her into the tea-room for ten minutes."

"Very well, then. When Sir Philip brings her back, I will introduce you to her. Isn't she a beautiful flower to have been picked up growing wild on the downs near Chiltern?"

"Did you find her actually sitting under a hedge?"

"Something very like it. She was buried in a little place close to us, living with Mr. Chiltern, the man the Chase would belong to, you know, if his ancestors had behaved themselves. While my grandfather was saving money, Azalea's was getting through his fortune at Chiltern. Now we have the Chase, and they are very poor."

"She is well-born, then?"

"Her family is considerably older than most in the peerage."

"That's a comfort. Now there is so little left to the upper classes, I am glad all the beauty does not come with the overdressing from Lancashire."

"You go in for being as aristocratic as ever, I see. I suppose St. Petersburg is hardly likely to cure a man of his exclusiveness. I am going in for the other extreme. We are to be regular social radicals on Thursday, and are going to a Mrs. Palmer's ball at Willis's Rooms."

"You don't really mean it, Madge! I could not believe such a thing of you. I am sure you don't know her, and oughtn't to want to know her either. She's the vulgarest-looking woman I ever saw in a drawing-room."

"I don't suppose that will hurt us. Lady Ada Lushington has taken her in hand, and asks all the people; so I suppose every one will be there, and we sha'n't have to do more than bow to Mrs. Palmer as we go in, even if that."

"Well, every body ought to be ashamed of themselves, I think. For the sake of an evening's amusement, they will go and accept the hospitality of an underbred woman, utterly unfit to be in their society."

"But, Reginald, no one wants her society."

"Then, you ought not to accept her hospitality."

"But we give quite as much as we get. She is even better pleased to have us than we are to go. Good birth is all very well in its way, and I don't in the least undervalue the fact that one of my grandfathers was an earl. But still, sitting at home reflecting over the glories of one's ancestors is not nearly so amusing a way of passing an evening as going to a ball that is to be first-rate in every way."

"Except in the little particular of the lady who gives it, and who very likely will tell you that 'Lady Hada 'as took 'er up,' like the woman in 'Pendennis.'"

"Please don't talk to my mother in that strain. Lady Ada and I had hard work to make her promise to go; and if she hears what you say, she will certainly change her mind about it. Why should we try to be so much wiser than all the rest of the world, and spend a dull evening, with nothing to support us through it but the sense of acting up to some transcendental idea about *noblesse oblige*? Nobody cares about people being well-born in these days, as long as they are rich."

"I am afraid they don't very much; and that is one of the reasons for the vulgarity and bad tone of London society. I have been reading science lately, and have had all my old feeling about the value of good birth confirmed from a source that I least expected."

"You don't mean to say you have found any thing to back you up there. I always fancied modern thought was so very democratic."

"The men who write often mean to be great democrats; but I take their facts and draw my own conclusions. I can thank one of them for giving me good reasons for my exclusive tastes that you have always laughed at."

"Please tell me your theory," said Madge, who was easily interested. "I have always had an idea that it was very clever to be a radical—rather wicked, you know, but very clever; and I fancied those clever scientific men, who try to bother good people about their religion, were all great liberals. Are you going to explain that monkeys are particularly aristocratic animals? because that will prove too much. The Manchester people are just as much descended from them as we are."

"Or just as little," returned Reginald St. John. "No, I don't want to ennoble all the tribes of monkeys. But, without doing that, I got an idea from that monkey-book which confirms me in my belief that there are real advantages in good birth. I always knew there were; but I can reason it out better now."

"A neat bit of reasoning is a very pleasant thing to listen to; so please let me hear all you have lately learned."

"You understand, don't you, what it's the fashion nowadays to call 'natural selection'—what we used to call 'the best fellow always coming to the front?'"

"Oh yes; I know all about that."

"Well, then, I may conclude that my ancestor, ten generations ago, was a better man than Mrs. Palmer's, since he distinguished himself, and hers didn't. Now, my race have been enjoying for ten generations what I call the higher side of life. They have been placed above sordid cares, and have had the leisure necessary for culture and refinement. You can actually see the effects of the lives

they have led in their appearance, and hear it in their voices. It would be against all reason that in reality they should not be better men. Only, of course, it requires a sharper eye to know a gentleman when you see him, than to be struck by a splendid house, or a turnout that costs a thousand guineas; so that there is small chance of the superiority being acknowledged by the multitude, when the wealth of the rich man and the refinement of one who is well-born are side by side. When all this mass of modern wealth comes in, all the delicacy and refinement, which it may have taken generations to develop, are in danger of being overlooked; mere money carries the day on every occasion, and we see the result in the flash and glare of a London season. It's like a rush of water into a flower-garden; in an hour's time the work of years will be undone. There is something so tangible in wealth, that good-breeding and refinement find it difficult to make way against it."

"Refinement is perhaps a negative thing, and money a very positive one," said Madge; "and so is vulgarity. You may show that you are vulgar in half a minute; but it's seldom one has a chance of proving one's self a lady in so short a time. In fact, any effort to show how lady-like you are is sure to end in a most dismal failure, and nothing stamps a person more quickly as vulgar. But we are a long way from Mrs. Palmer's ball, aren't we?"

"Not in the least. You see, I have proved to you that we people with ancestors must be her superiors; and you know those who go to her ball go simply because she is rich. Now, I don't want you to be among those who allow wealth to take the place of refinement in your acquaintances."

"Oh, dear me," said Madge, "don't ask that. But here's Azalea coming back, and I will introduce you now."

Azalea, had been dancing, but very quietly, and did not appear more heated or excited than when she first came into the room. She was undoubtedly the handsomest girl there; but to her this only took the form of a great number of men wishing to be introduced to her; and she hardly knew that, had she been plain, it would have been different. Her face exhibited none of the radiance which is pretty to see on the face of a young girl who feels herself to be the beauty of a ball-room.

"Azalea, dear, this is my cousin, Colonel St. John," said Madge, introducing him. "We have stumbled on a sort of imitation philosophy while you were taking endless turns in the conservatory with Sir Philip. Reginald, you ought to talk out your theory with Miss Chiltern: abstract subjects are more in her line than in mine, and I only let you run on in the hope of your saying something which I could turn into an argument for going to Mrs. Palmer's."

"I don't think I gave you one," replied St. John.

"I am afraid you didn't. But you must not persuade Azalea out of wishing to go to Mrs. Palmer's. If you talk in the same strain to her, I fear you may; and if she agrees with you, she will act up to her opinion. Now, with me it does not much matter what I think. I always do what I like best, and feel quite confident that somewhere there's a satisfactory theory that will just match my conduct. It's much the best plan. Nothing is more provoking than to deny yourself a pleasure from a sense of duty, and then afterward to find out you were all wrong. But I am going to dance this valse, I believe; so, Azalea, suppose you go down to supper with Colonel St. John."

An hour or two later, Azalea was carefully putting her flowers in water; and then, as the early dawn was beginning to break, she laid her white cheek down on the pillow, which it almost matched in color, and was soon sleeping as peacefully as a child.

Not so Madge. She could not so easily shake off the excitement that this her first ball, after a long time spent in retirement, had aroused in her; and she watched the sunrise with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes from her window.

"I wonder if Reginald would do for her," she mused, half aloud. "She is more likely to be taken by him than by the regular Guardsman type. I dare say he is not a bit better than most of them, but he looks more refined. I never saw him so much struck with any one before, and if he calls within the next three days, I believe something will come of it. He never does pay visits, so that it really will mean something.

"I should have liked a better match, but one can't have every thing. He is more likely to interest her than any one else she met to-night, and time presses. I should not be surprised to hear any day that Harold was home, and any body who will take her mind off him will do. Whatever she may think, she's no more in love with him than mother is; but if she heard he was coming back before she is in love with any one else, I don't know what might not happen.

"I fancy she is obstinate, and if she gets it into her head that it behooves her to be constant, or any nonsense of that kind, I may have hard work. She *ought* to see the ruin it would be to Harold to marry her, and the good thing it would be for him to marry me; but I am afraid neither of them would take that view of the matter. They would think it sordid or mercenary, or some hard, disagreeable synonym for sensible.

"I dare say Mr. Chiltern would see the

thing rightly. I fancy the same idea has crossed both our minds; but Mr. Purvies, Harold, and Azalea are as likely as not to think it quite a disqualification in me that I can be so useful to Harold as his wife. Of course, his heart is set on getting back the Chase—he can never get it by himself; and mine is set on letting him have it on easy terms. It ought to be possible to arrange, but I don't know that it will be.

"I am sure the terms *are* easy: I am not at all bad-looking, he was always fond of me, and I mean to make him a really good wife. It will suit me better to marry him than any one else. I know he is good. I should like to be a real Chiltern, and to feel always as I did when a child in that pure Dillon atmosphere. London, and London ideas, feel so dirty beside Harold and Uncle John. But I don't feel sure Harold will see his own interest. There are certainly more blind people out of asylums than in them, and I should not wonder if we were forced to have a bazaar for Master Harold, in the end, and all because he can't see what is for his good now."

So Madge mused on, while watching the dim outlines of the houses becoming more and more distinct in the growing daylight, till at length the sun caught the tops of the trees in the square garden. She turned from the window, saying,

"How pretty London looks in the early morning! A ride in the park now would be a real pleasure; but I suppose no groom would stop if I ordered the horses at five in the morning. Well, if I am to get up again to-day, I had better go to bed now, however great a pity it may be to shut out this early sun."

CHAPTER XVII.

MADGE was disappointed the following afternoon.

When the hour for driving came round, Colonel St. John had not called, and would not do so now, unless he merely left a card of civility on his second cousin—for Lady Margaret was not more nearly related to him. He knew their habits too well to come after four o'clock, if he had any wish to see Azalea.

But if Reginald St. John did not call, many others did; and as Madge passed through the hall ready dressed for her ride, she stopped and examined, with great satisfaction, the cards which all but covered the table.

"Yes, it's as I thought," she said. "Here's the Duchess of Waltham's card, and one for her ball on Friday. And here are the Temples, and the Verschoyles, and the Herrises—all first-rate people, who would not go out of their way to know us if they didn't want something. Of course, they want Azalea at their balls. I really think Reginald was right about going to Mrs. Palmer's. It will be better to make ourselves a little *recherché*, as we seem to have the chance of being able to do so."

The following day Colonel St. John called. The three ladies had barely finished luncheon when they were told he was in the drawing-room. Madge looked pleased when the servant announced her cousin, and she so contrived that Azalea and he were soon conversing together. Azalea was as yet hardly equal to London small-talk; but a beautiful face and a graceful manner lend a wonderful charm even to the most commonplace remarks; and when he left, St. John thought he had passed a very pleasant half-hour. It was rather refreshing to find a girl to whom the personal gossip of London was pointless, and who could relish no story about her neighbor's eccentricity or misfortune, he being unknown to her.

Before leaving, Colonel St. John asked to be taken into Madge's studio, to criticise her latest work of art. He was a connoisseur in painting, china, ivory-carving, and art generally, as became a finished and cultivated English gentleman, of which species he was a fair specimen. I fear, though, in his taste in art, as in some other things, he was perhaps more keenly alive to the letter than to the spirit; and if placed before one of Fra Angelico's frescos, might have been more inclined to criticise severely its want of correct drawing than to admire its angel-like feeling, purity, and beauty.

"I am so glad that we are to go to Waltham House!" said Madge, as she showed him her work. "I have so long wished to see the pictures there; and Azalea, I am sure, will be delighted. I know she will appreciate the Italian pictures, for as a child she was at Lugano, and the mere remembrance of Luini's fresco there is a pleasure to her."

"Would you care to see the pictures at Lancaster House? I think, if you like, I could take you there some morning," said St. John.

Madge would like it of all things, and for two very good reasons: First, she was really glad of any chance of seeing good pictures; and then she was almost equally glad of any occasion that threw Azalea and her cousin together. It was a promising sign that Reginald should wish already to arrange a further meeting. Her love of pictures was nothing new, but this was the first time that he had shown sufficient interest in her taste to put himself to any trouble in order to gratify it. Of course, no one in Madge's world was supposed to care to do any thing that was no pleasure to him or herself, therefore St. John must have some gratification of his own in view in making

his proposal; and Madge at once decided that this would consist in being in Azalea's company.

"Come to lunch on Tuesday, and we can go afterward," she suggested.

"Thanks, I think I will. Your Wiltshire flower looks as if she might be cultivated into all but perfection."

"Yes; but she's by no means altogether a wild flower. She was brought up by two scholarly old men, and has picked up a good bit of real hard learning from them. She is more like a highly cultivated Provence than like a brier rose."

"So much the better. A beautiful woman ought to be perfect in all ways, and an uncultivated mind is very far from perfection."

"From an artistic point of view, I do not think Azalea could be improved. She is really, in some ways, very highly educated; and yet she is so simple and innocent in all the ways of this wicked world."

"Then pray don't spoil her by teaching her any of them, so that, when July comes round, and the season is over, you may be able still to say as much."

Lady Margaret made no objection to accompany Madge and Azalea to the private gallery on Tuesday. Colonel St. John was more to her taste than most of the men Madge attracted to the house; his manners were finished, and she was sufficiently old-fashioned to like men to be "polite to all ladies." She was often heard to say that the two men with whom their courtesy made it a real pleasure to have intercourse were the vicar and Mr. Chiltern. The good manners of most London men, she thought, seemed to have been buried with the last generation. She made an exception of Reginald St. John, who had inherited the courtly manners of the last century, and who saw no particular cleverness in treating women as if they were college chums or messmates.

All were delighted with the collection for which St. John had procured an order.

"No wonder people in London are clever and cultivated," said Azalea, as they left the house. "What would not my uncle and Mr. Purvies give for two such hours as we have just enjoyed!"

"I thought you would like seeing pictures with so good a guide as Colonel St. John," said Madge. "I wonder if there's any other collection we could see?"

"There's that very best of all collections, the National Gallery; but, as a rule, people seem to care very little about visiting it," replied St. John. "The way they crowd to the modern rubbish in May, and never take the trouble to look at the grand old masters under the same roof, is one of the many wonders of the London season."

"To be sure, Azalea, you must see the National Gallery. Will you *cicerone* us there some day, Reginald?"

"I shall be very glad to do so. It is always a pleasure to see pictures with those who so fully appreciate them."

"Then let us go on Friday afternoon, and we can compare it with the gallery at Waltham House in the evening."

Nothing could promise better. Madge was delighted. Colonel St. John was evidently ready to go anywhere, and do any thing, as long as he might be with and talk to Azalea; and Azalea herself in talking with him had become quite animated, and had discussed the pictures with as much eagerness and discriminating taste as if she had been brought up among studios.

"Shall we put you down at your club?" asked Lady Margaret.

"Thank you. Then I will meet you at four o'clock on Friday in Trafalgar Square?"

"Yes; we will not keep you waiting."

And St. John left them, and the ladies drove off in the direction of the Park.

"You will miss your ride, I am afraid, this afternoon, Madge," said Azalea.

"Never mind that, for once in a way. I have had a pleasant afternoon, and one can't do more than enjoy one's self."

"My dear, you are becoming quite sensible," said Lady Margaret. "You used always to be wanting to be in half a dozen different places, and doing half a dozen different things, at the same time."

"Ah, mother, I am growing older and more phlegmatic. Age has a wonderfully calming effect; and, besides that, I think at any time I should have been quite content with such a treat as we have had this afternoon."

"Reginald is certainly a very agreeable young man," said Lady Margaret. "He is well-informed, and has gentleman-like manners."

"Indeed, he is very pleasant," joined in Azalea. "I am so glad, Madge, it is not that Sir Philip Tremayne who can take us to see pictures. Colonel St. John is so much pleasanter."

"I don't know that many girls in London would agree with you there. Sir Philip is one of the best matches of the season; and I can assure you most young ladies would have felt flattered and quite elated by the number of turns he took with you in the conservatory the other evening."

"I simply felt very much bored," answered Azalea. "He hardly said a word, and I did not know what to say either, and yet he went on walking up and down. I could see no natural conclusion to it all, and began to fear I should have to stop with him till it was time to go."

"Poor Azalea!" said Madge, laughing. "I saw you looked rather sorry for yourself, and not at all disposed to make the most of your opportunity."

That night, when Madge and her friend had gone upstairs to bed, Madge, as was her wont, followed Azalea into her room for a little more talk. She had been busy talking all the evening, but as long as she was awake she never wished to be silent, and she did not yet feel sleepy.

"Dear Madge," said Azalea, as she closed the door, "I want you to promise me to leave off doing one thing that annoys me very much, and that I am sure you must know I can't like."

"What is that, my beauty?"

"Talking as you did to-day about good matches. As far as I am concerned, I can't bear it. I think it's a horrid way of talking, in any case; but as for me, I should think you might have guessed by now that it can not in the least matter how many grand *partis* there may be in London."

"But it does matter, Azalea," returned Madge, rather impatiently. "I am not going to let you lose this chance of a settlement in life by any of your absurd girlish scruples. Do you suppose you will find Dillon a very happy or interesting home after three months of London? Are you prepared to spend the rest of your life there? You know the dullness and monotony of it all will kill you, now that you see that there is something better in the world."

"Then Uncle John was right, and I ought not to have come," said Azalea, musingly. "He told me just what you have now said."

"Nonsense! that's not at all the right conclusion to draw. The true moral is that, having once got away, you won't go back again—at any rate to live there. When you have made a suitable marriage, you may go and spend a week or two with your uncle, like a dutiful niece. But for a London beauty to retire to the Wiltshire downs as an old maid would never do."

"I may go back to Dillon, and yet not be an old maid, Madge; but I certainly won't go back there as a married woman."

"Don't make such rash assertions. I sincerely hope before July to see you and some favored one starting as a 'happy couple' for your honey-moon, either at Chiltern or some other country place that may have been lent you; and I am accustomed to see my hopes fulfilled."

"Then, Madge, you must not hope that. Perhaps," she went on, hesitatingly, "perhaps I had better be quite frank with you. I don't think he would mind your knowing;" and raising her large, truthful brown eyes and looking straight in Madge's face, though as she spoke she flushed a little, she said, "It's more than three years since I promised Harold that when he came home he should find me just as he left me, caring for no one so much as for him, and with no one to come between us, and I mean to keep my word. Whether the result will be that I shall be an old maid, I can't tell; and I don't know that I care so much as, perhaps, you think I ought."

"Do you mean to say he actually made you promise any nonsense of that kind?" said Madge, speaking as if she were very much vexed. "I thought better of him. Of course, any one could see, you silly child, what your head was running after. I could have told you, after I had known you a fortnight, that you were possessed by some romantic idea that loyalty to Harold obliged you to refrain from falling in love with any one else; but I did not guess he had exacted a promise. It was very wrong of him."

"Why was it wrong?" asked Azalea. "There was no 'exacting' in the case. If he preferred finding me unmarried when he came home, it was simply natural I should say that he should."

"How that boy has been spoiled by you all at Dillon!" exclaimed Madge. "If he had said he should like to find you without an arm, I suppose you would have cut it off for fear of disappointing him."

"But you see he did not ask any thing so cruel," answered Azalea, laughing, "so I may keep them both," and she raised both her beautifully molded round white arms and placed them on her friend's shoulders.

"He asked something far more cruel," said Madge, moving backward; she was not in a mood for caresses. "He may very likely spoil your whole life by his selfish indiscretion."

"Madge, I won't have you say such things!" returned Azalea, in her turn indignant. "How dare you use such a word as 'selfish' of Harold? Is he to go out, and exile himself, and work himself to death in that dreadful climate and country, and then be called 'selfish' if he asks one little thing of me? There's nothing I would not do for him, and I am sure it's little enough he has asked."

"You don't know what it is, Azalea. It's his ruin as well as yours. Do you mean to marry him when he comes back?"

"I don't know," answered Azalea, her momentary excitement over. "I am not sure what he may wish," she said, dreamily. "I only know what I promised."

That was the only idea she had on the subject; she had thought over no plans for the future that might be the result of her faithfulness.

"Well," said Madge, sitting down on the edge of the bed, "we had better talk this matter out, now we have begun. Come and sit down for a little."

They had both been standing before the dressing-table; but now Azalea got on to the bed and seated herself there.

"Now, just let us look at this little matter from a common-sense point of view."

Azalea was beginning rather to dread Madge's common sense; she found it difficult to distinguish between it and ordinary worldliness.

"For what purpose, after all, has Harold gone into that dreadful exile you talk of?" continued Madge.

"Because he thinks it his duty to try to make his family rich once more; and because money is needed to allow of his father and him taking their proper position in the world. It's been his dream ever since he was a boy. He went, against his father's wishes and every thing, for the good of the family; and you can talk of his being 'selfish!'" Azalea answered, becoming indignant once more.

"Gently, gently," said Madge. "He has, you say, put himself out considerably to make a fortune, and to raise his family; and, of course, he wants to get Chiltern back again. You need not mind saying so to me; of course, he wants to get Chiltern before he's forty. It's only natural. But he's eight-and-twenty now. Do you suppose he's likely to make eighty thousand pounds by the end of the next twelve years?"

"What can I know about his chances?" said Azalea, bewildered.

"You may easily imagine that he can't possibly make it. These are not the days of pagoda-trees. He is doing very well—better than he had any reason to expect; but still, if he succeeds in saving twenty thousand by the time he wants eighty, he will be very lucky."

"You think, then, that his winning back the Chase is quite a forlorn-hope?"

"By his own unassisted efforts, I do. But he need not despair, for all that. Why should he not fall in love with and marry some girl with money? He is good-looking, agreeable, belongs to an old family, has every thing to recommend him—only he's sadly in want of a fortune. There are plenty of girls about the world with what he lacks; why should he not marry one of them, take possession of the Chase as soon as he likes, and let us Liffords walk off with the young lady's money? Then it's the same with you. You are charming and lovely, and every thing a man could wish for in a wife—only you have no money. Could any folly be greater than for you and Harold to think of one another? You must see it when it's put plainly before you. And do you not also see how much easier you will make it for Harold to gain the object of his life if he finds you married when he comes home?"

Azalea listened as Madge expounded her views, with her earnest eyes fixed on her friend's face. When she finished, she was silent for a moment; and then, lifting her hand to her head, exclaimed, with distress in her voice,

"Don't, don't, please, Madge, talk in that way! It hurts me."

"But don't you hurt Harold?" continued Madge, persistently. "Could he not have the Chase next year, if he tried my plan? And when do you expect he can if he marries you? Of course it's not pleasant to stand in the way of a man's fortune, and you don't thank me for pointing out the truth to you; but truth it is, nevertheless."

"I don't know about its being truth," answered Azalea, with unusual energy. "And I don't know if Harold means to marry me. But I do know that he's utterly incapable of marrying a woman in the hope that by doing so he will get back the Chase. He may go from home, work harder than any one ever worked before, and take to trading; there's nothing dirty in that. But as to selling himself for Chiltern, giving his love in exchange for a house—he would rather never set foot in England again than entertain the idea of such a bargain."

"Then he's very foolish. Why shouldn't he fall in love with the girl as well as with her fortune? All attractiveness is not the exclusive property of poor people. I only want him to turn his love to some useful purpose, not to marry without love. And for you I feel the same. Get Harold out of your mind, and fall in love with some man you can marry, without its being an injury to him. Let us have two comfortable couples instead of one starving one."

"I can't argue with you, Madge, I don't know how to do so; but, somehow, when you talk in your sensible, worldly way, I feel inclined to cry out, from the bottom of my heart, *Sursum corda!*"

"What's the use of that?" answered Madge, bitterly. "*Sursum corda!* Did I not once do so after my light, and what came of it? Not an idea of any thing but pure feeling made me run off with Frank: and yet shall I not to the end of my life regret that I did not mix a little prudence, and even worldliness, if you like, with my love?"

She paused, but after a minute's pause continued:

"I have, however, bought my lesson, and I want you to avoid my mistake. A marriage with Harold would be nearly as bad for you both as mine was for me. I dare say you may now think me mercenary, but you will know some day that I am right. Perhaps my soul does cleave to the dust, but, as long as it's gold-dust, I am no worse than my neighbors. Go to any London railway-station between nine and eleven, and see all the hard, eager faces rushing off to the City in their haste to be rich. They are not merely bent on keeping wife and child, nor have they in view the winning-back of an old home, but they are simply trying to amass wealth for the gratification of the thing. If I am mercenary and low-minded, there

are plenty of people to keep me in countenance."

"That would be small comfort, Madge, if you were as bad as you ask me to believe. But I don't believe you are. I am sure you can not sympathize with labor that profits so little as that of a man who is busy amassing the root of all evil, for the mere pleasure of being rich. Dear me!" she mused, "St. Simeon Stylites led a useful life, compared with some business men—forever gazing and gazing into the blue sky, yearning after God and union with him."

Azalea looked as dreamy as a mystic saint or a desert father as she finished; and Madge hardly knew how to bring her back to the dusty world to which she wished to confine her thoughts.

After a moment's thought she settled that she had said enough for the occasion. She had broken the ice, and given Azalea an idea that her devotion might simply injure the man she hoped to serve; so, leaving the poisoned seed to bear its own rancorous fruit, she gave Azalea a hasty kiss, and left her for the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As arranged, the National Gallery was visited on the following Friday. Azalea lingered in the first rooms, quite enraptured with the beauty of the early Italian school. Colonel St. John, on the contrary, was urging her to follow him to what, in his opinion, were the superior beauties of the Bacchus and Ariadne, and the Paul Veronese, in the rooms adjoining.

"That angel will haunt me—I could look at it forever," she said, as she reluctantly turned from the beautiful circular Botticelli in the corner. "Is it not a lovely face? How I should like to be able to draw well enough to copy it! Could you not paint it, Madge?"

"I am afraid not. There's nothing of the angel about me; and I am sure I should not succeed if I tried to copy one. If you painted, you would look in character drawing angels, just as I seem to be doing the right thing when I am painting blood-hounds."

"All the same, I wish you could copy the angel for me," answered Azalea.

Colonel St. John had no sooner heard the wish expressed than he began to consider how he could gratify it, which may be taken as a sign that he was fast becoming far from indifferent to Azalea. He soon decided that he would take the first opportunity which offered itself of losing some bet with her, and then, as its payment, surprise her with a copy of her favorite picture, the order for which he meant to give on the morrow.

"But come into the next room, Miss Chiltern," he said to Azalea; "and I am sure you will find the beauties of Botticelli and Fra Angelico overshadowed by my favorite. Come and see the queen of the gallery—Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne."

Azalea and Colonel St. John were now on the opposite side of the room to Madge and her mother, and moved together into the next room.

"Does not every thing pale before this rich beauty?" Colonel St. John asked.

Azalea looked steadily at the picture for some minutes before answering, and then she said,

"The coloring *is* wonderfully rich; and no one can deny the genius of the man who painted such a picture. But it does not affect me as those earlier ones do. Somehow, I don't feel as if I should be any the better for living with this picture, as I feel I ought to be if I lived with one of Fra Angelico's."

She spoke hesitatingly, and half to herself.

It was a new kind of art-criticism to St. John's ear, and one he would have simply laughed at had it fallen from the lips of any one else. But he was, above all things, a man of subtle and correct taste; and as Azalea spoke simply and earnestly, he looked down at her beautiful face, in which there was not a sign of self-consciousness, nor an idea of talking for effect, and recognized that her words were entirely in keeping with herself. His taste stood him sometimes instead of the purer feelings of our nature, and allowed him to acknowledge and admire feelings on a higher level than his own ever reached.

He therefore fell in with her mood, and answered, "'*Durch das Schöne stets das Gute*;' surely you agree with me there?"

"Oh no, I don't," she answered, with some animation. "I always want to reverse that saying, and then I could say 'Amen' to it truly. I should never have any faith in goodness built merely on beauty or feeling of any kind. But wherever goodness is, beauty of the best kind will surely follow very quickly. I can't explain it, I know, but I wish you knew Uncle John, and then you would understand me."

St. John smiled at her earnestness, and, as she looked very lovely in her eagerness, would willingly have prolonged the discussion. But she turned from the picture which had occasioned it. Excitement with her was seldom more than momentary, and she was soon silently happy over a Francia, leaving St. John to decide in his own mind that, much as he admired Ariadne, it would no longer be her face that the picture would most vividly recall to his memory, but one of a different and more saint-like type, that had ventured at the very foot of her throne to dispute her paramount claims to his homage.

"Have you been here long enough?" asked the patient Lady Margaret, at the end of a couple of hours. "We shall have a great deal of standing this evening."

"Of course we shall. Poor mother! I had quite forgotten how tired you must be by this time. Come, Azalea, we must really be going."

"How thoughtless we have been!" exclaimed Azalea. "Dear Lady Margaret, I am so sorry if you are tired! We deserve to be made to stop at home to-night."

"Then, I hope we may not get our deserts; and I don't much think we shall," returned Madge.

Nor did they. By eleven o'clock Azalea was again wandering through a picture-gallery with Colonel St. John, and again delighting him with her beauty, sweetness, and intelligence. The ball was very grand in all respects. The large, brilliantly lighted rooms, with flowers blooming on all sides, seemed to Azalea like fairy-land; and the music, concealed behind a forest of flowering shrubs, but sounding sweetly and softly through space, added to the enchantment.

The company was such as Azalea had never yet seen gathered together, its high-bred and aristocratic appearance being such as is not often seen out of London. The men, if not all handsome, could, at any rate, boast of that look of refinement which in a man is often the best part of good looks; and the women, if not all beautiful, yet for the most part were possessed of good looks, and were at least well dressed, and had the finished manners and grace which at first sight almost take the place of beauty.

Once more Azalea could stand favorable comparison with those around her. There was no lovelier girl in the room, and very few who could be compared with her. The ball was a repetition of ball number one: again many fresh introductions, and again a supper and a walk through the rooms with Colonel St. John.

"It's too bad of St. John," remarked Sir Philip Tremayne to a satellite. "He balked me at Lady Burne's. I intended taking Miss Chiltern in to supper, and he coolly walked off with her; and here he has just played me the same game again."

"What a shame! Poor girl!" answered Captain Wyatt. "But those non-marrying men are always the ones to come in a fellow's way. I don't wonder at chaperons hating them."

"I don't know about marrying myself just yet. I suppose, however, I ought to settle down soon, and she certainly would look grand at the head of my table at Kirkwell—wouldn't she, Dick?"

"Yes, she's just the style to suit a fine old place like yours."

"Of course I could do much better; but beauty's a great thing, and she has good blood in her veins. I don't care in the least for money, and I think, as long as a girl is fairly well-bred, looks are the first thing for a man of my stamp to think of."

"That's right, Phil. Your wife can always hold her own in the county—your position insures that—and she would hardly be a greater lady for being a Percy or a Howard. But she ought to be a beauty, and your daughters ought to be beauties too."

"Why, yes, that's what a fellow has to look to. I could never stand plain daughters; should have them smothered at once, you know. And yet I don't see that a man has a right to expect any thing else if he takes no trouble about their mother, and doesn't look to her points."

"Miss Chiltern is by far the handsomest girl out this year," answered Captain Wyatt, "and at this early date you are pretty sure to have it all your own way. St. John can't count for any thing serious, and there's no one else, as far as I can see, in the running. If you hang fire now, in a few weeks it may be too late."

Thus encouraged, Sir Philip Tremayne decided that he could not do better than, as his friend expressed it, enter the running, the stake being Azalea's fair white hand. Girls who are brought out in London, after having entered into a private contract with some country swain, would certainly save their friends much trouble and disappointment if they would take Ethel Newcome's hint, and appear with a ticket, "Sold," or, if they prefer it, "Given away," on their backs. A clever milliner would so manage the words that they should be no disfigurement to the most elegant toilet.

Azalea and Colonel St. John walked from room to room, and through the long gallery, the walls of which were covered with the works of the old masters.

"I am keeping the best for the last," he said; "there's a little room at the end with about half a dozen gems in it, that are worth their weight in diamonds."

At this moment Sir Philip accosted Azalea.

"Our valse will begin in a moment, Miss Chiltern. You will find my name on your card."

This was true; and Azalea had no choice but to relinquish Colonel St. John's arm and take that of the less interesting Sir Philip.

"You must see the small room," said St. John. "Are you engaged for the next dance?"

Azalea examined her card.

"No," she answered. "It is a polka mazurka, and I don't know how to dance it."

"Then, may I have the pleasure of showing you the Leonardo after this dance?"

She bowed assent, and he went off to find Lady Margaret, so as to be sure of catch-

ing Azalea the moment she was released by Sir Philip.

"I don't know what has come over St. John since he was in St. Petersburg," remarked Sir Philip, rather sulkily. "He used to be a good sort of a fellow, in his lazy, do-nothing way. But he's grown so outrageously conceited of late."

"Has he?" returned Azalea. "It must be difficult, I suppose, for a man who knows so much to be unconscious of it. How can he help knowing that he's very clever?"

This was hardly the answer Sir Philip cared to listen to.

"I don't suppose he knows much more than the rest of the world," he said. "He's a prig, you know; but I don't think there's any thing else very remarkable about him. When you have seen a little more of him, Miss Chiltern, you will find out that he's only a prig, and nothing more."

Azalea was nevertheless very glad to be claimed by the prig when her valse was over. She found him standing by her chaperon, and, had she been able to overhear the conversation which had been going on between the two while she had been dancing, she would have found herself listening to little else than a duet on her own beauty and virtues.

"It was Madge's idea to bring her to London, and I am very glad I did not oppose her wish," said Lady Margaret. "She is such a sweet, gentle girl, and so easily amused, it is quite a pleasure to take her about. And you know, Reginald, all Madge's friends have not been to my taste."

"I think Madge seems quieter than in old days," said St. John.

"She is not so quiet as when we were alone together at Antibes. I was very happy with her there, but am now dreading the effect of London as much as ever. I hope, though she is so much younger, Azalea's quiet example may be of some use to her. Ah, my dear, have you done dancing?" she said to Azalea; "would you like a seat?"

"You must not disappoint me of the pleasure of showing you my favorite room of pictures," said Reginald.

"It would be my loss to miss them," answered Azalea. "Thank you, Lady Margaret, I don't think I will sit down now, as I may never have another opportunity of seeing these pictures."

"I am glad Sir Philip released you so soon to-night," said St. John, as they walked off together. "I was fearing he might detain you, as he did at Lady Burne's. You don't know how long I waited for the pleasure of making your acquaintance, while you walked up and down that conservatory in Berkeley Square."

"Did you? He is very kind and attentive, but he seems to have very little conversation."

"Ah! but then he has got so much of every thing else. You should see his place in Warwickshire. I don't think there's a second so perfect in many ways in the whole of England. A real old Elizabethan house, and such a deer-park! I should be thankful to own a little cottage in a corner of it."

And having so far explained his rival's advantages, St. John thought he had done all, and more than all, that could be fairly expected of him. He had generously told Azalea of all Sir Philip's splendid possessions, and admitted that he himself was altogether wanting in any.

The reader need not fear that I shall inflict on his patience a description of all Azalea's gayety.

The usual course of a London season is well known. Fresh faces and fresh spirits in April and May, which by degrees become pale and faded, and by July almost worn out. Pleasant balls and gatherings, where every one is glad to meet in the early days; and crowded, overgrown parties in the later ones, when people have met till they are tired of one another, when every form of gayety has been enjoyed to satiety, and the only topic of conversation in July is how soon it will be possible to escape from that which it was thought Paradise to enter in April.

Azalea's season was what Madge called somewhat *ménagée;* by which she meant that she was by no means allowed to accept every invitation that came to the house, to be out every evening, or to remain very late at any party. Therefore, when the end of June came, she was not looking so much the worse for her gayety, as most of the fashionable young ladies in London. She could not easily have been whiter than when breathing the fresh air on the Chiltern downs, and going to bed at ten every night; so far as complexion was concerned, there was little change to note in her.

The busy life of pleasure she had enjoyed seemed to have improved her both in looks and manner. Her face had gained in animation and brightness; she could now talk with more freedom and ease, and although her manner had always been perfectly self-possessed and dignified, it had now gained that indescribable finish which can only be acquired by social intercourse.

Azalea never succeeded in making a sharp repartee, but she often now volunteered remarks, and started subjects of conversation; and even Mr. Chiltern would, on her return to Dillon, find it difficult to ignore her existence as he had formerly done.

CHAPTER XIX.

JUNE was drawing to an end, and in a few weeks Lady Margaret would be crossing the Channel, to pay her yearly visit to one of the German baths. No settlement having been so far found for Azalea, Madge was most anxious that her mother should extend her invitation to her friend, and persuade her to accompany them to Ems, in which pretty little watering-place it had been Lady Margaret's habit of late years to spend August and part of September.

Reginald St. John also talked of going to some German spa, and Madge felt sure, if Azalea decided to go to Ems, that would also be his destination; and she had great hopes that evening walks in shady avenues would result in the positive declaration of affection which London gayety and sight-seeing had so far failed to bring forth. For, constant as had been their intercourse, all but daily their meetings, and certain as Madge felt that Reginald was becoming more and more deeply in love with her friend, he had so far spoken no word that even Madge's most sanguine imagination could construe into a direct avowal of his hopes.

Azalea and he were very intimate; she was always glad to talk to him, and without doubt preferred him to any other man in London. She could hardly have been more friendly in her manner, or more willing to be in his society, had she been prepared to accept him.

Madge was always ready to leave them together, and on all occasions to throw them on one another for society. She knew there was but little chance of Azalea marrying a man like Sir Philip Tremayne; but even with Harold she thought St. John might compare favorably; and she did her best to induce Azalea unconsciously so to encourage him that she could easily appeal to her pity when the daily-expected proposal came, and insist that, after all the apparent pleasure she had received from his attentions, she would be acting very badly if she refused him.

That Colonel St. John had quite made up his mind to marry Azalea if he could, Madge was convinced; still, he was very slow. Here was June nearly over, every body anxious to be getting out of town, Lady Margaret only waiting to hear that her favorite rooms at the Quatre Tours were vacant in order to start, and yet nothing definite had been said by Reginald.

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that Madge should wish Azalea to continue with them, and not at once to return to the solitude of Dillon, there to await the arrival of Harold, which now might be expected in a few weeks, or at most in a few months.

Lady Margaret did not oppose the idea. She thought it would be very pleasant to have Azalea to talk to, as they sat under the trees listening to the band, and Madge flirted in an unknown tongue with the German officers. Mr. Chiltern, who was of course referred to, saw no objection; and if Uncle John again expostulated, he did not carry his remonstrances so far as to write and beg Azalea to return home.

Had he done so, he might have been more successful in his persuasions than on the first occasion, when he had tried to prevent Azalea from having a season in London, as she herself was by no means so keen to go to Ems as she had been to come to town.

The idea of foreign travel was not unwelcome to her; but, then, to counterbalance any pleasure she might hope for, was the thought that perhaps Harold might return to Dillon in her absence, and find her apparently enjoying herself on the Continent, and not at home to welcome him. She had no idea how long he might be going to remain in England: she had only a few weeks previously received a hurried line, saying that he had been ordered home on business by the head of the firm for which he worked, and that his father's letter would explain all further particulars. As she was away from Dillon, and both her uncle and the vicar were bad correspondents, she had not heard more. All she was certain of was that, some time in August, Harold would be at Dillon; but whether he came for a week or a year was in the dark, and the prospect of being from home during his possibly flying visit, was one that distressed her to contemplate.

Still, she was so little in the habit of asserting her own will, or of expecting to have her wishes gratified, that when her uncle told her to go, and Lady Margaret and Madge pressed her to accompany them, she was powerless in their hands, and Madge was able to inform Colonel St. John that she had persuaded her friend to spend a couple of months with them at Ems before being banished for good to Dillon.

"At Ems, really," he answered, slightly raising his eyebrows, and suddenly deciding that the spot for his autumn sojourn was no longer a matter of uncertainty. "I too am intending to see what the waters there will do for a worn-out old soldier."

"Has your wound been troubling you lately?" asked Madge, as gravely as she could, though she failed to control altogether the risible lines round her mouth. St. John noticed and perfectly understood her expression; but he thought it better to allow the old wound to bear the responsibility of his being thrown as much as possible with Azalea.

"Why, yes," he answered, "it always troubles me more or less in the autumn;

but in any place abroad, where the climate is dry, I have less of that neuralgia which bothers me so much in England."

"Ems is very dry, if rather confined," said Madge. "When do you propose going?"

"I don't much care for a week or two. If I can be of any use to your mother, or any of your party, on your way there, I shall be very happy to place myself at your disposal."

"Better and better," thought Madge; "for without a very strong motive he is the last man to play the tame cat, courier, or lady's companion kind of part."

"Many thanks," she answered, aloud. "I am sure my mother will be very glad of your help. She will take old Warren, of course; but, although he has been so much abroad with us, he has not succeeded in picking up a word of any language but his own, and it always ends in our having to do a great deal more for him than he ever does for us."

"Then I shall consider myself under orders to move at any time you may wish in July."

"Thank you. We shall be a very pleasant party. I am sure Azalea will be glad," she added, hesitatingly, for she was a little bit afraid of her cousin, and would not for the world have ventured to "chaff" him on any subject which she had reason to suspect was near his heart. "You draw her out so much more than any one I know. She is so very silent with most people, but you seem to have so many tastes in common; she has always plenty to say to you."

To this Reginald gave no answer. Azalea was now far too dear to him to allow of his discussing her with any one, not excepting her friend, Madge Elliot.

"Mother dear," said Madge, next time she was with Lady Margaret, "I think you will get to Ems more comfortably than usual this summer. Reginald St. John is going there, and has just been telling me that he would like nothing better than to start at the same time as we do, and to be of use to you on the journey."

"That will be very pleasant. I fear I shall never get used to traveling without a gentleman. But, Madge dear," she went on, hesitatingly, and half blushing as she spoke—"Madge, my dear, Reginald has never been with us so much as this year—he never used to call so often; and I should not have thought that he would have cared to travel with ladies. Is there any thing—you would tell me, dear—do you think he is becoming fond of you?"

Even Lady Margaret did not think that it was Azalea who was the attraction. She was accustomed to see Madge surrounded by young men and admirers, but there was something incongruous in Azalea's character and appearance and such surroundings.

"Mother, you are becoming positively suspicious in your old age," laughed Madge. "No, I can most truly say that I am sure I have nothing to do with Reginald's wish to be of use. I think he is becoming fonder of ladies' society than he used to be."

This was apparently the case. But why, if, as Madge rightly guessed, Azalea was the cause of this change—why did he not decide his fate at once? He had now been thrown constantly with Azalea for more than two months; and if he wished to marry her, a longer acquaintance was hardly necessary before he took the first step toward coming to an understanding with her.

Perhaps he was clear-sighted enough to understand that, pleased as Azalea always was to talk to him, and intimate as they had become, he was still very far from having raised any feeling in her warmer than friendship. She never started or looked discomposed when he came near her; her color never changed, nor was she less collected when he spoke to her. He watched her carefully, but he could never see any difference in her manner while speaking to him, or talking with his aunt.

He would have given a great deal to detect a blush or a start on his approach; but there was never any thing save the sweet, calm smile, which captivated while it disheartened him.

He was sufficiently a man of the world to be anxious to avoid a refusal; but yet Azalea was a prize he could not bear to relinquish with any chance of winning her untried; and a month at a German watering-place, where they could meet hourly, was just what was needed to decide if there was any chance of his succeeding. If, after thus being thrown together, and after doing his best to make himself acceptable, he still saw little chance of gaining Azalea's hand, he would then resign all hope; not without a pang, but still with dignity.

He was now five-and-thirty, and should he be unable to realize this his best and last wish, he was nevertheless fully determined not to play the part of a love-sick boy. Of course Azalea was not his first love; but he thought she was likely to be his last, and that he should die unmarried if she never became his wife. He would have disowned the littleness which inclines a man to look on a refusal as almost an insult; but, nevertheless, he was not disposed to run the risk of one. He himself thought that this was owing to his love for Azalea, and the anxiety which would spare her any pain, as he felt sure she felt sufficient friendship for him to make it very distressing to her to refuse him; and he also argued that, whatever might be his fate, he

should in any case be sorry to lose Azalea as a friend.

So he lived in hopes of time discovering to him whether he could propose to her with any chance of being accepted; and till he had good reason to hope, he would keep silent. Meanwhile, he gathered some encouragement from one little episode which took place before they all left town.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was another man besides Reginald St. John who was anxious to find an opportunity to ask Azalea to be his wife. This was Sir Philip Tremayne. Why he had not yet done that on which he had determined two months ago, he could not say. He was troubled with none of the doubts that perplexed St. John. When away from Azalea, he was always firmly convinced that he had only, as his friend Captain Wyatt expressed it, to say "snip," and she would answer, "snap."

He was not extraordinarily conceited, but he had been brought up with the not uncommon idea that a baronet with fifteen thousand pounds a year is not likely to have to ask in vain for any thing he may wish for, from a horse or a yacht up to a wife. He was accustomed to feel almost as great a man in London as on his own estates, and to be looked up to as reverently by mammas with marriageable daughters as he was by his own tenants.

He believed that with his fortune and position he was entitled to the hand of any girl on whom he might fix his fancy; and why should he except Azalea? No doubt she was very beautiful; but, then, she was penniless, and her birth, though fairly good, was not equal to his own. Altogether, the London world would be rather surprised to hear of her good luck, and he could not have any serious doubts as to her own satisfaction at his proposal.

It was thus he argued when alone, or when talking the matter over with his admiring and confidential friend, Captain Wyatt. But, somehow, when he was with Azalea, things wore rather a different complexion. He could not remember, when in her society, half the pretty things which he had intended to say to her before they met. It seemed absurd that a girl in her first season, and who was certainly not given to sarcasm, should be able to make him forget all his "heads of conversation," to feel any thing but at his ease, in fact most uncomfortably shy, and in the general state of mind which made the very idea of proposing seem almost presumptuous.

Azalea, as Madge had said of her, looked as if she ought to be Empress of all the Russias, or to reign after some equally grand and transcendental fashion. Her calm and rather dignified manner almost awed the worthy baronet; it was so different from the tittering, laughing, blushing way of most girls in their first season. The fast ones, however sharp, he thought himself a match for; and with the shy ones he was equally at home. He would "chaff" with Madge for an hour at a time, and at any rate be unconscious that he did not give as good as he got; why, then, could he not be as thoroughly at his ease with her friend?

The diffidence he felt in her society in no way decreased his wish to marry Azalea. He had thought she would make a grand-looking mistress for his house, the first time he had seen her. Her manner and appearance were such as would exactly become the wife of a great country gentleman; and, as we saw, he was ready to marry her before they had met half a dozen times. But if he was ready then, he was eager now; and perhaps her indifference added to his eagerness. Any other girl on whom he bestowed so much attention would have shown a little more anxiety to be in his society, and a little more pleasure at his decided preference. But Azalea did not seem to be in the least degree more flattered by Sir Philip's admiration than by that of the humblest member of her acquaintance, and this indifference added to his zeal a hundred-fold.

As he was to start for Cowes even earlier than the Ems party made their move, it was necessary for him to come to an understanding with Azalea before many days were over. He had confided to his friend that he intended to make an offer to Azalea; and they neither of them doubted that, such being the case, the marriage would come off as soon as customary arrangements could be made.

Captain Wyatt would naturally have preferred that his friend should remain single. He enjoyed having the yacht to sail in, and he liked feeling as thoroughly at home at Kirkwell as he had been allowed to feel of late years. But, of course, it was not to be expected that Sir Philip would remain a bachelor for his sake; it was his obvious duty to marry and continue the illustrious house of Tremayne, and the most that Captain Wyatt could hope for was that the future Lady Tremayne would not banish him altogether. He thought Azalea did not seem to be the kind of girl who would interfere unreasonably between her husband and his old friends; she would never allow them to become perfect strangers in the house where they were now so intimate, and he was therefore anxious to forward his friend's marriage by all the means in his power.

These mainly consisted in unweariedly singing the praises of Sir Philip and his

seat, Kirkwell, whenever he could secure Azalea's ear.

It was one morning at the end of June, when Sir Philip was just on the point of leaving town, that he decided he really must propose, and get the matter settled that very night.

"Look here, Dick," he said to his ally, "I think I should like to come to an understanding with Miss Chiltern to-night. I did not care about being tied earlier in the season, but I should like the matter settled before leaving town; so I shall put the question this evening, if I get a chance. That fellow St. John will do all he can to prevent my getting an opportunity, I know; but I want you to balk him, and manage that I do. You must be in Stanhope Street early, get hold of Miss Chiltern at once, and mind you keep off St. John till I come. You had better let me find you in the conservatory."

"All right, Philip; I will manage for you," answered Dick.

No great contrivance proved to be needed. St. John was even later than Sir Philip in arriving at the ball where all our friends were to meet; but the faithful Captain Wyatt had, nevertheless, succeeded in keeping Azalea free from any early engagement, and at liberty to listen to his patron as soon as he put in an appearance.

He first asked her to dance, and then took her into a secluded corner of the conservatory, where no one would be likely to find her, while he discoursed on the merits of Sir Philip, the beauties of Kirkwell, and the wonderful sailing powers of the yacht.

"You can't guess what a good fellow he is, Miss Chiltern. I am half disposed to envy the girl he marries."

"Is he engaged to be married?" asked Azalea, with what the clever captain took to be well-assumed indifference.

"No, no, not yet. But he ought to marry soon; and all I can say is, that whoever he chooses will be a happy woman. Kirkwell wants a mistress—it will be quite perfect then; but it does want a mistress. You have never been in Warwickshire, Miss Chiltern?"

No; Azalea said she had never been in Warwickshire.

"You ought to see Kirkwell," he continued—"it is really, I think, as a whole, the finest place in England. The park is seven miles round, and all fenced in for deer, you know; and then the house stands just in the right place—a quarter of a mile from the lake; and the gardens are—etc., etc." And so he ran on, till the owner of all this magnificence appeared on the scene.

Sir Philip looked rather nervous and excited, as if he had some great matter in hand; but his lips were pressed tightly together, a sign that he was determined to carry through the business, however distasteful it might be to him to come to the point.

"Ah, Phil," said Captain Wyatt, as he approached them, "you appear at the right moment to continue my description. I was just enlarging on the beauties of Kirkwell, for Miss Chiltern's benefit."

And so, having fairly started his friend on his road—for what could be easier than to pass from Kirkwell to its future mistress?—he discreetly disappeared, leaving Azalea to pace the conservatory with the baronet.

The latter said nothing for a few minutes, till Azalea, to avoid one of his long silences, which she was beginning to dread, said,

"Captain Wyatt has been telling me that your home is so beautiful, Sir Philip. How fond you must be of it!"

"Oh yes, it's a nice place enough, but there's not much good talking about it. What I should like," he went on, rather hurriedly—"what I should like, you know, would be to show it to you."

"Thank you," answered Azalea, very quietly, and no more expecting what was to follow than if it had been Captain Wyatt who was speaking—"thank you," she continued, "but I am afraid I am not likely to be in Warwickshire. When we leave Ems I shall go home, and probably shall not move again for a long time. As a rule, I am always at home."

"Yes, that's as it ought to be. I like women who are content to stop at home; but, then, what is to be your home, Miss Chiltern? You see, that's the whole question. I want Warwickshire to be your home. Won't you think about it?"

Azalea almost laughed.

"Live in Warwickshire!" she said, without in the least taking in how or why he should express such a wish—"I am afraid I shall never be able to do that. I am quite sure my uncle would never leave Dillon. You would not advise him to leave a county in which his family have been settled for nearly five hundred years?"

"No, no, Miss Chiltern, I am not thinking about that. No man ought to leave his own county, not for any thing. But—but—" Certainly proposing was more difficult than he had imagined. "But I hope you would not make it an insuperable objection that my property lies in another county. It does not so much matter for a lady to change her county."

Azalea's eyes opened wider and wider. What could Sir Philip mean? As I have before said, she was always slow at grasping a new idea, and then she had read so few novels, and thought so little of the various forms an offer of marriage may take, that she really had no notion at what Sir Philip was aiming. He went on:

"It does not much matter to a lady changing her county; it's what so many do, you know. And I am sure you will like Warwickshire, and Kirkwell really is not a bad place: it only wants a mistress; and if I could only persuade you to be that, there's nothing in the world I would not do to please you. Of course, you must guess how much I care for you—I can't tell you how much. If you are not sure, pray don't hurry about answering," he added, suddenly struck by something in Azalea's face which, as his meaning at length came home to her, was far from encouraging. "I could wait a little while, you know, while you thought the matter over. But please think seriously about it. You can't tell how happy you would make me, if you would promise to be my wife."

Poor Azalea was horrified. What had she done to bring such a misfortune upon her? Far from feeling flattered, as many girls do, by a proposal, even when they have no intention of accepting it, Azalea was distressed beyond measure by Sir Philip's words. She fancied at once that she must have been to blame in some way unknown to herself. She must have unwittingly encouraged him, and have led him to imagine he had reason for some hope, or he never could actually have asked her to be his wife. She could not answer at first, but she looked so distressed, and unlike her usual calm and collected self, that Sir Philip began to fear that he was hardly likely to receive the ready acceptance he had fancied awaited him.

"If you are in doubt, or would like to talk the matter over with your friends, I can wait, you know. You need not give me an answer off-hand."

"Oh, I am in no doubt," faltered Azalea. "I am so sorry! I can not tell what I can have done to make you think I could ever marry you. I really did not mean it. I dare say it is all my fault. I am so sorry!"

"But you don't mean to say you won't think about it, Miss Chiltern?" said the crest-fallen baronet. "Pray just consider a minute. I would do all in my power to make you happy—indeed I would; and really Kirkwell is not a bad place—any woman might be happy there; and you should have a house in London, and every thing you fancied that it was in my power to give you."

Of course, as his certainty of gaining the prize diminished, his anxiety to obtain it increased; and Sir Philip was ready to offer every thing, or to make any promise which, after his light, he thought likely to induce Azalea to accept him.

"Oh, please don't!" was her only answer —"please don't! Nothing of that kind could make any difference to me. I am so sorry, but it's really no use thinking. I know I could never be more to you than I am now."

At this moment Colonel St. John entered the conservatory, and, fancying it empty, he was close to Sir Philip and Azalea before he noticed them.

Azalea only saw in him a means of escape from Sir Philip and his unpleasant pertinacity. He seemed almost like a brother, so intimate did she feel with him compared to the man who was wishing to marry her; and as he was passing her simply with a bow she stopped him, and, suddenly taking his arm, said, in a hurried and, for her, almost impetuous manner,

"Oh, Colonel St. John, will you take me back to Lady Margaret? I—I—I don't know where she is."

Azalea looked flushed and excited, and her manner was so agitated and unlike her usual calm that St. John had little doubt as to what had passed, and could readily guess why she was so anxious to escape from Sir Philip, whose downcast and disappointed face was almost as readable as Azalea's own.

As there was little doubt, from the whole scene, that he had proposed and been refused, Reginald was quite ready to pity and feel sorry for the poor fellow. That he would have been equally pleased to rejoice with him had his countenance borne any signs of the triumphant lover is more doubtful.

"Oh, please do find Lady Margaret soon," said Azalea. "I will not leave her side again to-night," she went on, not in the least guessing that she was betraying herself—in fact, hardly knowing what she said, in her anxiety to get safely under Lady Margaret's wing once more.

She clung to Colonel St. John's arm, and seemed to look up to him for protection, in a way that sent a thrill of gratification through him. She talked of going to Lady Margaret, but, when once escaped from the conservatory, she seemed quite able to recover her composure without any other help than his.

"Come," he said, soothingly, overjoyed at the confidence she was showing him—"come and have a cup of tea. I am afraid you are a little put out. Sir Philip seems to have been unfortunate in his subject of conversation."

"Don't talk of him! How could he!" she went on. "I hardly know him—and to speak to me in that way! I was so glad when I saw you come in! I didn't know how I should ever have got away," she added, half laughing; and then, by degrees, she recovered her usual manner, and with returning self-possession came the fear that she had betrayed more than she ought.

"Please," she said, "don't tell any one about it—about my asking you to take me away."

It was delicious to him to be thus confided in by this lovely young creature—to have a secret between them, unknown to any but themselves. He was disposed to make the most of the happy accident which had forced him into her confidence.

"No, my dear Miss Chiltern," he ventured to say. "I will certainly not mention further that poor Tremayne is desperately in love with you, and that, notwithstanding all his money and lands, you have been hard-hearted and refused him."

"What has his money to do with it?" asked Azalea, without noticing she was tacitly allowing that his interpretation of the scene he had witnessed was the correct one. "How could he imagine I cared for him? I must have been in some way very much to blame. I must have given him reason to think very differently from any thing I meant. I don't know how I shall forgive myself."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself so much on that score. I am sure you have done nothing wrong. But it is difficult for a man like Sir Philip, who has been flattered and toadied all his life, to realize that he can't have every thing he may fix his fancy on. Half the girls in London would have been delighted to accept him simply as the owner of Kirkwell; and his only mistake was, he had not sufficient discrimination to see that you belong to the other and better half—half, do I say?—that there is no one who can compare with you in any way."

This was outspoken—more so than any thing St. John had yet allowed himself to say to her. But Azalea at the moment was too much engrossed by the novel idea of girls being ready to marry for the sake of being mistress of a beautiful place, to take in the full meaning of his concluding remark.

"Is that really so?" she asked, doubtingly. "Do you really believe many girls would marry a man they hardly know, merely for the sake of living in a big house? I know Madge thinks so, but I did not believe you would. I thought you looked at things differently—more as Mr. Purvies does."

"You must not think that I approve of it because I state the fact. I think it quite as disgusting as Mr. Purvies can. I only told you as an excuse for Sir Philip, and to prevent your thinking yourself in any way to blame."

"I don't know, I am sure, if I am to blame. I certainly had not an idea that Sir Philip was thinking of any thing of the kind; and as to marrying a man for the sake of his place, it seems to me about the most foolish as well as the most unwomanly thing a girl can do. You can but be in one room at a time; and then where's the use of there being fifty more in the house?"

Reginald laughed.

"That's a practical way of looking at the matter," he said. "But, you see, there's so much *sous entendu* in the fact of owning a big estate, so very much beyond the mere choice of rooms to sit in. There's nothing I should like more than to be master of a fine property, and to be able to carry out all my own plans. Now and then I have some ideas, but with my small means, of course, I can't attempt to work them out; and when I feel so cramped, I am tempted to think that a large fortune with plenty of land is, of all things, what I should like."

"If it came to you naturally, or you thought it ought to be yours by inheritance, that I can quite understand—there's nothing I wish so much as for my cousin Harold to recover Chiltern; but that is different from marrying in order to have a fine place. I should be very sorry for Harold to marry for money, even if he could have Chiltern to-morrow by doing so. It would poison my whole joy in the Chilterns regaining the Chase, if it were the result of such a marriage. When you have thought much of, and longed for, a thing, and then get it by ignoble means, it seems to me almost like desecration."

She spoke strongly and feelingly. Madge's words had not been forgotten. Often she had mused over them, and again and again decided that it was impossible that her hero should ever so lower himself and his aspirations after the home of his ancestors as to sell himself to fulfill them.

And now this evening she felt more vividly than she had yet done the enormity of such a sin. The idea of her marrying any one but her cousin had been brought actually before her by Sir Philip's proposal, and her indifference to marriage in general was at once changed into almost repugnance to the thought of any but one with her cousin.

The opportunity for the sacrifice which Madge urged her to make had presented itself, and she had only felt how entirely powerless she was to accept it. All the thinking which Sir Philip had urged could make no difference. She could not for an instant entertain the idea of marrying for money or position. And if she felt this horror for herself, she felt it equally for Harold. She was guided in this feeling mainly by instinct. She was naturally so diffident of her own judgment, that if her sentiments had been a matured opinion, she might have been more doubtful that she was right. She had no vehement opinions of her own; her nature was too modest, and her humility too unaffected.

With St. Theresa, she was disposed to think that "being a woman was sufficient to account for her stupidity," and would never have ventured to oppose her own judgment to that of Mr. Purvies or her

uncle. But, unsuspected by herself, her feelings were of no ordinary strength, and even had she lived in a country where *mariages de raison* are the rule, she would have found it all but impossible to conform to it. Her instinct against such unions was so strong that she would have felt herself compelled to follow its guidance without further thought.

Still, had Sir Philip, instead of applying directly to herself, addressed himself to her uncle, and had the latter advised or ordered her to marry him, she would have had a severe conflict with herself, and she would have been merely supported by her instinctive feeling: she would have had no reasons to give for her refusal. The same kind of submissive feeling she experienced for the father she felt in a far greater degree for the worthier son. She *could* not have opposed Harold's judgment in any way, or have imagined for a moment that she could know better what was for his real interest than he knew himself.

Doubtless her great affection for Harold was partly the reason. She loved him so very, very much. The remembrance of that one long embrace on the misty downs—that moment when a strong passion had suddenly awakened in her, in all the full-grown imperiousness which had completely mastered her — the consciousness of that moment, which must either sweeten or imbitter her whole future life, was never altogether absent from her. But, notwithstanding her love, she had calmly and patiently borne with his long absence, and could still peacefully wait till they should both be agreed that no longer parting was needed.

When Madge told herself that Azalea was no more in love with Harold than she was with his father, that short-sighted young lady was quite wrong, and her judgment very superficial. She judged of others' love by her own impetuous self; and because Harold's name was not always on Azalea's lips, because she bore this long, trying separation without murmuring, and because she could discuss her cousin without superlatives on the one hand or a flood of tears on the other, Madge decided that Azalea felt no deeper feeling for him than she might have felt for a brother, and that she herself was in no way endangering the happiness of either by endeavoring to separate them.

Of Harold and his feelings she was more ignorant; but in spite of her ignorance, she had little hesitation in settling off-hand that no man who really cared for a beautiful girl would go off to India for an indefinite time, leaving her either to pine for him or to forget him, as the case might be. She would not deny that he might have had a momentary feeling of madness, in which he thought himself in love with Azalea; but that it had been transitory she felt convinced, otherwise it would more have influenced his conduct.

It suited Madge's scheme not to allow that it was possible she was bent on separating a pair of devoted young lovers. Such cruelty, of course, she would have been incapable of; and therefore, from her point of view, it was necessary that the affection of the cousins should exist only in their own imaginations.

This was her theory, and if the facts did not square with it, why, so much the worse for the facts. This kind of self-deception, which not the less is gross selfishness, is not uncommon in these days, when it is not the fashion to be cold-bloodedly wicked and cruel, and when willful natures are nevertheless as keenly bent as ever on having their own way.

Of course, Madge had seen that when she had told Azalea it was her duty to give up all thought of marrying her cousin, the idea had distressed her. So much she was forced to allow; that was the natural consequence of her having taught herself to believe that she was in love with Harold, and was bound to attend in every way to his wishes. He had said that he wished to find her unmarried when he returned to England, and, half as a child who will obey any one whom she has been taught to look up to, and half as a girl to whom it is every thing to have a lover, Azalea had naturally been distressed at the thought of resigning her cousin.

In this last surmise, Madge showed how very little she had mastered Azalea's character. Azalea had read no novels, and never pictured herself a young lady to whom a lover was a necessary adjunct, and such a thought had not crossed her mind. Her feelings being so strong, she would in all likelihood have fallen in love, when in London, either with St. John or some other admirer, had she not been plate-armored against every other love by the one she felt for Harold. But in that case she would have fallen in love just "because it was her nature to," and not from any preconceived idea that it behooved her as a young lady and a beauty to have a lover.

Madge could not easily imagine the feelings of another, unless they showed themselves much as her own would have done under the like circumstances. As a fact, no two women could show what was passing within them more differently; or, rather, no one could show her feelings more than Madge, or less than Azalea.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE *maître-d'hôtel* at the Quatre Tours at Ems, after the exit of some Russian grand duchess, was at last able to inform Milady Margaret that a charming little suite

of rooms *au premier* was at her disposal; and the 15th of July was fixed on as the date for crossing from Dover to Ostend.

London had become very hot; the grass in the parks was far more brown than green; no amount of watering seemed to keep down the dust; and all were glad to leave town.

Lady Margaret was always happier in any other place than London; to Madge, any change was welcome; and Azalea was thankful to escape from the place where she was now in constant dread of meeting Sir Philip. She had not seen him since the evening of her last ball, but she did not know that he might not still be in her neighborhood.

As a fact, having attempted and failed in that which alone had kept him so long in London, the baronet had started for Cowes the very next morning. His faithful shadow, Captain Wyatt, had accompanied him; and, with the help of his re-assurances, and consoled, too, by the wonderfully swift-sailing powers of his yacht, the *Voltige*, by the time she had won the cup for him at the regatta, he had recovered both his spirits and his courage, and was almost ready for another attempt at proposing.

For he was not inclined to take Azalea's view, nor to consider her rejection of him, as decided and final. The first hour or so he was undoubtedly crest-fallen and disappointed; but under the influence of his friend he soon recovered his hopes.

That Azalea had been unprepared for and startled by his proposal, he must own, though he had been convinced beforehand that any girl to whom he had been as attentive would be anxiously expecting a definite offer of marriage. This had certainly not been the case with her; seemingly she was different in many ways from most girls. But this very difference, and apparent want of appreciation for all he had to offer, only made Sir Philip the more eager to win her. He trusted much to her changing her mind when she came to reflect soberly over what she had refused.

The more she thought over his proposal, he argued with himself, the more disposed she *must* be to accept it. His were such *real* advantages; and the more they were weighed and investigated, the more solid would they appear. She could not but be struck with what she would hear on all sides of the beauties of Kirkwell, and of the value of his coal-mines in Derbyshire. And then, too, the number of centuries in which his had been a leading family in Warwickshire must impress her.

She would, of course, discuss the matter with her friend, Mrs. Elliot, and Sir Philip had a high idea of that lady's practical good sense and cleverness. Madge, he was sure, would be his ally, when once she understood that he was quite in earnest. If, up to the present time, she had seemed more anxious to throw Azalea into St. John's society than into his own, it must have been because she doubted that his (Sir Philip's) intentions had any serious meaning. No chaperon could hesitate for one instant between the two men.

He was not altogether wrong. Had Madge been able to discover any ambition or wish to be well married in Azalea, she would have cordially welcomed Sir Philip as her suitor. But her first wish was that Azalea should be married soon, and she knew that no idea of a *mariage de raison* would be powerful enough to displace Harold's image. Her only hope was in Azalea's actually falling in love with some one else.

Now St. John was a man specially likely to arouse a strong feeling. Azalea and he had many tastes in common; she evidently liked him; and he was in all ways what might be fitly called an interesting man, and that without the help of any estate or worldly grandeur; whereas, subtract Kirkwell and the coal-mines from Tremayne, and very little remained.

Madge regretted Azalea's peculiarity; she would have been much gratified had her *protegée* succeeded in carrying off the matrimonial prize of the season: to her it was even annoying that such a prize should have to go a-begging in vain. She had never doubted since early in the season that Sir Philip wished to marry Azalea, and she felt a kind of vexation at such an offer being thrown away.

We know that some people feel an absolute annoyance at the sight of waste or extravagance, independently of any loss it may be to themselves; and Madge experienced a feeling akin to this in seeing such a match as Sir Philip rejected, or even the possibility of winning him disregarded.

I once found the mother of five daughters in great distress at the impossibility of inducing one of the five to marry a man who was willing to relieve her of the care of her child. I tried to reason out the matter with her, and to show her how certain misery must follow on any marriage for which a girl showed so great a distaste.

"But why should she?" pleaded the mother. "I feel exactly as I did one day when we had a dinner party, and I had been down to Covent Garden and bought the dessert in the morning; and then, in the afternoon, a large hamper of beautiful fruit arrived from a sister of mine in the country. Fruit won't keep, you know, and it seemed such waste; and an offer lost to the family is just as bad."

Some such feeling Madge experienced. But still superior to every thing else rose her great wish that, by Azalea's own deed, Harold should find himself free when he reached England. If this could not be in-

sured within the next six weeks, it might be too late.

Madge was not sanguine enough to expect that Harold would now meet Azalea and not fall in love with her; though her theory required that his love of four years back should have been a mirage in his own imagination. He did not love her sufficiently now to feel any serious pain at her loss; but yet, aided by the remembrance of his past fancy, and also by the feeling that it was incumbent on him to be true to a few hasty and inconsiderate words spoken on the misty downs, he would be fatally in love with her a few weeks after they were again thrown together. And very fatal such a love would be to all Harold's ambitions hopes and true interests.

Such was the tenor of Madge's thoughts; and, unlikely as it would have appeared to any one else, she had really taught herself to believe that it was the actual state of things. It would seem improbable that any one so clear-sighted as Madge could thus deceive herself; but, clear-sighted as she usually was, she was still more self-willed. She had made up her mind that she wished to marry Harold, and to present him with Chiltern; and she was also convinced that she could never be guilty of an unkind or cruel action.

Bearing these her two ideas in mind, we see she could hardly have believed differently. She knew that she was acting for Harold's temporal interest, and she was anxious to feel as sure that she was acting in unison with his affections; and so forced her mind into the attitude which made such belief the easiest. A marriage between the cousins would be the ruin of both; this was the text she was never tired of studying. Mr. Chiltern would never forgive them, they would never recover their property, and the chances were in favor of her making a second marriage, which would not be nearly so much to her taste as one with Harold. She loved Chiltern; she had always liked and respected Harold; and, as his wife and its mistress by a double right, she would fill exactly the position which she thought would suit her—as the wife of the head of an old county family.

As I said, Azalea, when it came to the point, was very glad to be able to escape from Sir Philip by a flight to Ems; and before they started she had a letter from Dillon, which re-assured her on the point as to which she had been especially anxious.

Harold did not expect to arrive in England before September, and the business which brought him over was likely to keep him at home for an indefinite period; for it was no less than that of being confidential clerk in London to Mr. Macgregor. The time for the latter to retire from India had now arrived; but he would still attend to the business of his firm in London. He had become thoroughly used to Harold, whose intelligence and application to business had rendered his services, even in the short time he had been in India, all but necessary to his patron. Whatever Mr. Macgregor asked, it was, of course, Harold's interest to comply with; and he felt sure the former would not allow him to be a poorer man ten years hence, as a consequence of his present acquiescence.

The fear of missing Harold thus removed, Azalea was more than ready to enjoy her trip, and to be amused with all she saw, and entertained by every one she met.

On a hot July morning they left Hill Street and all London gayety and society behind them. Colonel St. John met them at the station, and at once took the direction and management of the party out of the hands of the gray-headed old butler—saw that the boxes were properly labeled, took the tickets, and examined the passports. The ladies were, of course, saved all trouble, even that of carrying their handbags. Two maids, a servant, and a gentleman were in attendance, and the result was that they had only to sit in the waiting-room till they were told to step into the train; and then, again, all that was required of them at Dover was to walk from the train on board the steamer.

Azalea thought that traveling under these conditions was charming. Though, as far as she herself was concerned, she believed herself to be, in the abstract, indifferent to money, in many ways she was by no means indifferent to money's worth. Her enjoyment of traveling, for example, would hardly have been as great had she been obliged to hurry and rush about, to get her own ticket, to look after her boxes, and to be laden with shawls and umbrellas. She liked calm, quiet; and, though unused to, and careless of, many so-called luxuries, she was far from being indifferent to one form of luxury, which, under many circumstances, may be very expensive—namely, never feeling the trial of having her grand calm disturbed by undignified haste and exertion.

In her case, the Jewish blood that ran in her veins retained all the calmness of its Eastern origin, and had not been destroyed by the quick sharpness which centuries of trading seem to have produced in the ordinary Western Jew. We can hardly recognize any likeness to the ideal snowy-bearded, impressive-looking Father Abraham, in his quick-eyed, sharp-looking descendants. Is it, indeed, that the supposed characteristics of the former exist only in our imagination? and ought we rather to see in cunning Jacob the real representative of the race? However that may be, it was easier to imagine Azalea as the descendant of the conven-

tional Abraham than is the case with most of his children.

The day was fine, and, once out of London, it was not oppressively hot; and the light breeze which refreshed them made the five hours' crossing pleasant enough. They reached Ostend about six, and, as they were to stop there the night, they proceeded at once to the Hôtel de la Plage, where they were able to forget they were in a sea-port, and only felt they were at the sea-side.

The novelty of being once more on the Continent was delightful to Azalea; and Madge, too, who had not before traveled by this route, was interested in all she saw. By the time they had dined it was eight o'clock, and as they rose from the table Madge said,

"Come, Reginald, you must smoke in company this evening, if you want to smoke at all. You really must take us on the Dike, and let us have a look at the Établissement. Ostend seems to me unique in its way. One is used to seeing grand dressing and fine ladies under trees and on lawns in pretty gardens, but it's something new to see such dresses wasting their beauty on an actual desert; for I never saw any thing more like a dust-hole than that dismal waste on the land side of the Dike."

Madge was not wrong; and certainly one of the most incongruous sights in Europe is the extensively dressed multitude that assembles on the Ostend promenade, and the appearance of the country immediately below it. It is true that at high water the sea breaks close below you on the other side; and, if well advised, you will keep your eyes and attention fixed on it, for there is certainly nothing else worthy of notice.

Although they had only been a couple of hours in the place, Madge had already taken in its characteristics, and of these the smart dressing of the ladies is decidedly the most prominent. Her own toilet had therefore been renovated, and her traveling costume discarded, so as to allow of her holding her own on the Dike, where the elegant Russians and Poles, and the dainty Parisians, were disporting themselves by the side of bourgeois-looking Belgians.

As to Azalea, her dress was always the last thing any one remarked in her. She was always either in black or white; and, by Madge's manœuvrings, her dresses had by this time become the very prettiest black and white imaginable.

Madge had just now plenty of money to spend, and was well pleased that a good deal should go in what she considered making the most of Azalea's beauty; and though no eye was ever first caught by her dress, no doubt it may have been partly owing to Madge's skill that Azalea had now a look of finished elegance which had been wanting to her a year previously.

The poor child would have been horrified had she had an idea of the sum expended on her wardrobe during the last few months. Before she left Dillon her uncle had given her a hundred pounds to spend on her dress. This had appeared to her a fabulously large sum to think of spending in such a way; but he had insisted on her taking it, saying she knew nothing of the cost of things in London, and that if she went out at all, she must do so after a manner befitting his niece, and a real Chiltern. He had no wish for the sham article—as he considered Madge, fond as he was of her—coming out as a grand lady, and the real daughter of the house of Chiltern appearing as a Cinderella at her side. The money was there, and he desired her to take it, and do her best to be well dressed.

Azalea at once decided on spending as little as possible, and husbanding all she could, as a small contribution toward the purse Harold was making. She thought five-and-twenty pounds would be ample pin-money for a season, and she would then have seventy-five to offer, should a small sum ever be needed to complete the requisite number of thousands required for regaining Chiltern.

Madge humored her in this idea, only asking to be given charge of the five-and-twenty pounds, as with her experience she would be able to make the money go farther than Azalea. Here Azalea made no objection. The subject of dress bored her, and she was only too thankful to have the trouble of it taken off her hands; and as in small matters she was very obedient to Madge, she always wore exactly what she was told.

This evening at Ostend, on the plea of the heat, Madge persuaded Azalea to change her black silk for a soft white muslin, elaborately made by the dexterous fingers of a good milliner, and which would safely stand comparison with all the Parisian magnificence on the Dike. As to the face and form enveloped in the cloudy muslin, Madge had no fear that their beauty would be successfully rivaled anywhere.

"There's a great crowd on the promenade, Madge," said St. John, as they left the hotel. "Had we not better walk in some other direction?"

He was well pleased to have an evening walk with the two girls, but had a fastidious man's distaste for overdressed multitudes.

"Why, Reginald, there is no 'other direction,' unless you wish us to wade ankle-deep through the sand, and that we are far too tired to do. Besides, I want to see this cosmopolitan world at the Établissement, and to listen to the band, which even from here sounds a good one."

So they made their way to the music,

which really was worth listening to, and, sitting down, soon found plenty of amusement in watching the people and the characteristics of the different nationalities.

"The Belgians are the people that trouble me most—they are any thing but *pur sang*," said Madge. "There are some whom it's all but impossible to distinguish from Germans, and here and there one almost equally like a Frenchman. If there's any truth in Reginald's theory, that the more races are crossed, and the more blood is intermingled, the better the result is likely to be, these Belgians ought to be very superior people."

"I am sure I hope they are," answered Azalea, "to compensate them for having to live in such a dreadfully flat country. I suppose we can see inland for some miles, and I can't detect the slightest rise on the horizon. It's as dead a level looking from the sea as looking toward it."

"The dead flat of the real Netherlands is certainly depressing. We were in Holland once for a week, and at the end of it I was glad even of a climb upstairs, merely for the pleasure of using whatever muscles one does use for mounting. But Belgium has some tidy hills near Liége, and that part of the country."

"Whatever else may be wanting, I hope I may never have to live in a perfectly flat country," said Azalea.

"Ah, you were spoiled in your youth by the Alps. Don't you long to see the snowy peaks and the sapphire lake, with its chestnut-woods, and all the beauties of Lugano again?"

"Don't talk of them, Madge, or I shall long for them too much. They seem to belong to an earlier and altogether different state of existence. I can hardly believe myself to be the same person as the little girl who used to run about the chestnut-woods, as often as not with no shoes and stockings on, and never with more than a handkerchief tied over her head to keep off the sun. I doubt even if I could talk Italian fluently now. You see, there's never been a vestige of my old life to remind me of it since I began my new one, and it is difficult to imagine myself the same person in both. Those pictures in the National Gallery seemed to bring a whiff of the past with them, more than any thing I have seen since I came to England."

"That's so like an Italian—to pick out the best thing in England, and say it just brings a whiff of Italy with it! But I don't know that you are wrong; it's a wonderful country. Art and nature seem to have been fighting for ages which shall have the best of it, and we reap the result of the contest. I should like to take you for a trip to Lugano, Azalea. Would you come?"

"Oh, you must not suggest any thing of the kind; I am sure my uncle would not like it. No; that old life is dead and buried with my mother, and I belong altogether to the Chilterns now. One can't have every thing; and, after all, the learning and teaching I have had at Dillon are worth more than beautiful scenery, much as I love it."

"But we might run down there for a week?"

"No, no, Madge—we mustn't; it wouldn't do. I think my grandfather was sorry to part with me, and he remembers me, and sends me a birthday letter every year, with a note for a hundred francs in it—he must be very lonely, too, since my uncle Orlando died; but I don't know that he would care much to see me again, if it was only for a week. His kind of mind, and, indeed, the minds of most of the people at Sorrengo, would be more disturbed than pleased at the idea of such rapidity of movement as is implied in traveling from England to Lugano, stopping a week, and then going back again. You can hardly realize, Madge, how distracting that would sound to people who have never even seen a railway, or traveled much farther than they could walk in a day."

Colonel St. John was standing a few yards off, smoking, while the two girls talked; but he soon threw away his cigar, came to them, and begged, with some irritation of manner, that they would take a turn.

His irritation was caused by the fact that, though they had seated themselves at the edge of the crowd, the men composing it had not been long in noting Azalea's unusual beauty; and a troop of German officers, eyeglasses in hand, and as many Belgians, now surrounded them on all sides; and, as is not unusual with foreigners, allowed no fear of annoying their object to interfere with their admiration, or to prevent their staring hard at Azalea's pretty face.

To an Englishman like Colonel St. John their behavior appeared little short of being grossly impertinent, and his first thought was to take the ladies out of the sight of these foreigners. This was difficult on the narrow Dike, for to whichever side they turned, that side quickly seemed to become the crowded one; till St. John at last, in despair, suggested that they should take a row on the lake-like sea, over which the moon was now throwing a bright silvery light. They could row quietly, he urged, under the wall of the Dike; and, as it was high tide, need hardly go out of ear-shot of the music. They would then, too, exchange the flaring gas-lights of the Établissement for the soft summer moonbeams that were glistening on the water.

Madge saw and understood Reginald's annoyance, and his manœuvre to get them out of reach of the officers' eyeglasses, and did not oppose the idea of a row. Azalea was perfectly innocent of any reason for moving,

but, as was usual, agreed to what was suggested.

The few words Madge had spoken, joined to the sensation of once again being on foreign shores, had brought before her mind the almost-forgotten Lugano with great vividness; and as she followed Madge into the boat, she was thinking more of Italy than Ostend. No, she would never go back there on a visit; but as she mused, it suddenly occurred to her that it might be her duty to go back to Lugano to live.

How would it be if Madge were right, and Harold did come home with changed feelings; or if his feelings were unchanged, but he became converted to what Madge called common sense—namely, the impossibility of marrying her and also regaining Chiltern? It would be too sad to stop at Dillon with Harold changed; nor did she think she could remain and see him take possession of Chiltern and share all its beauties with any other than herself. Could it be possible that he had better not be embarrassed by her presence when he came home?

Her grandfather, she felt sure, would be glad to have her again. Uncle Orlando had died two years back, and he was now a very old man, still living in the white house in the chestnut woods, and with only a *donna* to take care of him. She would be very welcome, she thought, in that empty, desolate house. She could not please Madge by directly disobeying Harold, and marrying before his return; but if, as Madge had tried to teach her, she was her cousin's greatest obstacle to gaining all he was working for, she could go to Sorrengo, and be equally out of his way. This would be an escape from her dilemma. If again urged to marry by Madge, she could suggest a return to her grandfather as a better alternative.

It would, indeed, be a cruel and bitter thing to do, to run away from her well-loved cousin; but it would be possible, she thought. Much as she longed to meet Harold again on the misty downs—downs whose bare ugliness was now dearer to her than all the vine-covered, luxurious beauty of the Italian landscape to which she was thinking of escaping; much as she had hoped to return to the old life at Dillon for a while, old and familiar, yet new with the increased strength of the love which had grown with years, and the change from a half girlish fancy to a woman's passion; much as she had dwelt on all the joy and happiness that might be in store for her—she yet felt it would be possible to renounce it all, if Harold's real welfare required such self-abnegation. She was quite willing to sacrifice herself if (and this she each time repeated with increased inward vehemence) she could do so in any other way than by a distasteful marriage. A flight to her grandfather might answer the purpose.

Colonel St. John was watching Azalea narrowly as she thus mused, and speculating as to what was likely to be the subject by which she was preoccupied. She was becoming daily a greater source of wonder to him. That her affections were already engaged he would not allow himself to imagine; and yet, if they were not, it was unnatural that neither he nor any of her London admirers should have made the slightest impression on her.

He could not think of classing her with the many unimpressionable girls whom he knew—girls who took admiration, and, if they could get it, love, simply as their right and their due, and in whom nothing raised any deeper feeling than one of mild gratification. No; he now knew Azalea well enough to be sure that she was of a very different temperament. Though always gentle, he had seen her kindle with enthusiasm over a beautiful picture, or the story of any great act of self-denial or heroism; and then, again, almost tremble with indignation at the tale of any wrong or cruelty. No; it was certainly not insensibility which was the cause of her bestowing no return for the love without measure which he was longing to give her.

Could it be that he was mistaken, and that he really knew nothing about women, and the way in which they show their feelings? Was she, perhaps, more favorably disposed toward him than he had yet ventured to hope? Could he be the cause of her present abstraction? Dared he flatter himself that she had at length understood him, and the words which he had often, in spite of himself, allowed to escape him? and that the thought of these, joined to the dreaminess produced by the soft strains of music stealing gently over the water, the beauty of the moonlight, and the complete romance of the evening scene, had produced this effect?

The boat was rowed slowly backward and forward in the moonlight, and the whole scene was almost a repetition, with minor differences, of one described many pages back, which was enacted at Lugano nearly four-and-twenty years ago.

The essence was the same; it was only the accidents that differed. The same lovely face, which the same moon rendered more attractive than ever in its pale beauty—the same old, old passion stirring in the man that sat looking at the picture, entranced by the figure which leaned back in the boat with hardly a sign of life. But for the time being St. John was more fortunate than had been Azalea's father; the vision on Lugano had simply rowed past the latter, and vanished into the shadow in a few moments. In this case it was different; St. John, seated in the shade, could without observation keep his eyes fixed on Azalea. This was

fortunate, for he would have found it difficult to keep them from her face.

Madge was quick enough to see that any conversation would be distasteful to her companions, and merciful enough to abstain from speaking. For a quarter of an hour or more they rowed in silence along the shore, the music, at first loud, growing softer and softer as the distance increased. Azalea was absorbed by her musings, St. John was equally absorbed by her and her beauty, and Madge was watching them both, and wondering if Azalea was at length touched by her admirer's devotion.

Could the meaning of his constant visits, Madge asked herself, his desire for her society on all occasions, be now dawning on her, and did she at last understand how she was loved? Or, better still, was she feeling within herself the first stirring of that which might develop into love on her own side? Never, she thought, was a more favorable opportunity given to a girl for falling in love: if the chord were not touched to-night, she should despair of her. The silent rowing on the sea, the soft strains of the music, and the silvery moonlight throwing a halo of romance over the really commonplace scene of a watering-place esplanade—the whole formed an atmosphere which, if externals affect the feelings, was likely to impress Azalea.

What did it matter that by tell-tale, truth-speaking daylight the Établissement was one of the most hideous structures ever erected? By moonlight, and at a distance, it looked like a scene of fairy enchantment, and the gas-lamps like glow-worms lighting up a fairy ball-room—the fairies being represented by ladies, many of whom a nearer inspection would have pronounced any thing but fairy-like, though when seen at a distance, flitting about in gossamer costumes, they helped to play their part in this midsummer night's dream.

The first break in the stillness of our friends was caused by a slight shudder from Azalea. St. John was at her side in a moment, arranging a light shawl round her shoulders.

"You are cold," he said, putting his whole soul into those most ordinary words, seeing he dared not use the loving ones that were hanging on his lips.

If Madge had only been out of the way, he felt that he must have put his fate to the touch. An all but irresistible impulse to pour out the treasures of his heart and lay them at Azalea's feet was overpowering him, and but for Madge's presence he must have yielded to it. He was disposed, so far as so gentleman-like a man could feel so uncivilly toward a lady, to wish his cousin at Jericho; though, behind the annoyance which was caused by her presence, a feeling lurked that it was well for himself that his imprudent haste should be checked.

If Azalea's feelings were at length veering in the direction of his hopes, nothing on his part could be more foolish than overhaste in trying to make her own it. No; he knew he ought to bless Madge for being an obstacle to any indiscretion he was tempted this evening to commit; but yet—what would he not have given to clasp the white hand that lay on Azalea's knee, and to have told her how he worshiped the very wood against which the other rested?

"Oh no, I am not cold," said Azalea, as St. John wrapped the shawl round her. "How delightful this is!" she continued, "and how much pleasanter than any thing in London! Look, Madge; at any of our balls did we ever see any diamonds to equal these?"

And as she spoke she let the water trickle through her fingers, and as each crystal drop caught the moonlight, it glistened more brightly and with a richer beauty than any gem.

"But the brightness is hardly so useful, you silly child. Your drops of water would not be so ready a means of filling up an inadequate head-dress as a diamond star or butterfly. But you make a very pretty water-nymph. I should like to paint you now, Azalea, just leaning over the edge of the boat. To complete the picture, yon, Reginald, ought to have a guitar and be lying at Azalea's feet. I have a very pretty composition in my mind's eye, and wish there were time for a sketch; though it would, I suspect, be a difficult matter to persuade Reginald to take the guitar."

"So difficult as to be out of the question. The guitar youths of art are, as a rule, nearer fifteen than thirty, and altogether of a different type from a used-up old soldier."

"And the maidens they serenade are certainly younger than an old woman of two-and-twenty," added Azalea.

"What nonsense you talk!" retorted Madge. "I consider you both in your *première jeunesse*. But it's too late to argue about any thing now. We ought to be going to roost, if we are to be up early to-morrow morning. The lamps are being put out at the Établissement, which means that all the good people are off to bed."

No objection was made; and thus the evening ended without any premature declaration on the part of St. John.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I AM so sorry we shall not see the sea again till we get home!" said Azalea, as she went with Madge to their bedroom. "Is it not odd to think we slept last night in London?"

"As odd as it would seem to your grandfather for you to run over to Lugano for a

week. But I have my own theory about time and distance, and I don't believe that a clock is always the surest test of the flight of time. I haven't got it distinctly in my mind yet, but space and time hang together in some way that no one has yet ever explained to me. Because we have changed the scene so completely, does it not seem more than twelve hours since we left Hill Street?—and yet it is hardly so much."

"It seems days to me. And time in dreams, too, passes so unaccountably. I have sometimes dropped off to sleep before a clock, and, from my dreams, I should have thought hours had passed; and, on awakening, have found it to be only a few minutes."

"Yes—I know. Time is one of the things that, as yet, is very little understood. But, at any rate, we know enough about it to be quite sure that it is time now to be in bed."

The morning sunlight dispelled any illusions that the beauty of the moonbeams had almost created as to Ostend being a desirable place to stop at. Its hideousness appeared in full proportions under the glare of a July sun; and not even Madge expressed any wish to remain, though the beach presented a very animated appearance; and to so expert a swimmer as she was, the sea always had a great attraction. She had on this morning left Azalea fast asleep at six o'clock, and gone down to the beach. She returned an hour later to rouse her less active friend with the news that she had had an hour's swim, and, thus having disposed of all superfluous energy for the day, they might rely on her being a quiet traveling companion.

Madge's activity was certainly at times somewhat overpowering. Both mentally and physically, it seemed all but impossible to tire her out; and she usually had some half-dozen plans and schemes in her head, any single one of which would have been enough for an ordinary mortal.

They left Ostend by an early train, and, on reaching Cologne in the evening, they found their way to the Hôtel de Hollande, where, notwithstanding the announcement that there was "*eine prächtige Aussicht von dem Belvedere*," they contented themselves with rooms which had been secured for them *au premier*. Nevertheless, in default of the sea by which they had wandered the night before, they had to climb the stairs to this belvedere, in order to enjoy the fresh evening breeze which blew down the river, and to escape from the stifling atmosphere of that historically interesting but somewhat unsavory city of Cologne. From this height they could see as far as the "seven hills" in one direction, and for miles over the flat, Dutch-like country in the other, while immediately below rolled the fast-running Rhine.

At its first view, Azalea could not refrain from humming, half to herself,

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,"

a note of which caught Madge's ear; and as they had this eagle's nest to themselves, and as she also insisted that sound always traveled upward, and could not possibly descend to the crowded building below them, she persuaded Azalea to sing them the whole of Heine's sad legend of the "Lorelcy."

After a pause, St. John said, "We must manage to see the cathedral in the morning before we leave. I am always glad to pay it a visit, though my highest-art friends will not allow me to admire its Gothic quite as much as I should wish to do."

"Then, I am sure I would not be guided by them. I always feel the better for a sight of it," returned Madge. "Azalea, you shall see a really beautiful church in the morning."

And so they did. After breakfast the three (for traveling was alone a sufficient fatigue for Lady Margaret, and she combined no sight-seeing with it) started through the narrow streets, and were soon admiring the still unfinished west front.

All, or the larger part, of my readers must have felt a thrill of delight pass through them as they enter that touching building. Superlatives are altogether out of place in describing it; to those who have felt its beauty they are worse than superfluous; and as regards those who have wandered through its aisles, and looked up at its lofty heaven-soaring arches unmoved, words will certainly not accomplish that which the building itself has failed to do.

Azalea's admiration and enjoyment of the cathedral surpassed all expression; her face only assumed the dreamy look of intense pleasure which the sight of any thing beautiful was wont to arouse. It was not as a critic that she walked slowly round and round the aisles, and up and down the nave; it was simply with a sense that her craving after beauty was thoroughly satisfied, and that for the moment was all she needed.

The three walked apart, occasionally meeting and exchanging a word.

"Do you think in this case I might be allowed to say, '*Durch das Schöne stets das Gute*,'" said St. John, coming quietly behind Azalea, and referring to their conversation before the Bacchus and Ariadne. "I am sure I feel a better man here than I do in Curzon Street Chapel."

"But the beginning of it all was goodness, and not beauty," answered Azalea. "Whoever he may have been, the architect of this cathedral must have been a good man. It could not have been designed by a bad one, in spite of the wicked legend Madge told us last night; and so beauty has sprung from goodness, and not goodness

from beauty, after all. Don't fancy I wish to underrate it; only, all that is best in beauty is merely the offshoot of virtue and goodness."

She spoke eagerly, and St. John looked down and smiled approval at her from his superior height as a man of the world. It was so pretty, this enthusiasm for beauty; and yet her love and value for unobtrusive virtue, such as she had described to him as existing in Mr. Purvies, towered far above even her real and true appreciation of art. What man of taste would not have been delighted with the combination?

He was even tempted sometimes to wish he could himself conjure up the same horror of wrong-doing, and the genuine love of virtue, that possessed Azalea. But after living for fifteen years in the Guards, hearing daily, if not enjoying, the conversation of a mess-room in which the gravest sins, the shadows of which Azalea had never dreamed of, were discussed with less tendency to blame than she would have felt for the slightest deviation from the path of rectitude, how could he regain her sensitiveness as to right, and her loathing for all that was false and bad? He was a fastidious man of taste, who till now had never had a doubt that his admiration of art and beauty was quite able to serve him in the place of religion. In fact, his religion was a mere worship of beauty in every shape in which it came before him; and his tastes were so much above those of the mass of men with whom he lived, that he had no idea there was a want in them.

He had never heard—few Englishmen have—that self-denial is the test of a man's faith, and the loving acceptance of the Cross is the touch-stone of a Christian. Yet, as will always be the case, by reason of this very want he failed to appreciate the highest beauty, which Azalea, with her inferior knowledge, but superior religious tone, spontaneously and instinctively admired.

"I knew you would care for this cathedral," said St. John. "Does it not almost make you long to be a Catholic, to have a real share in it? Look at those girls," he continued, pointing to two flaxen-haired Germans, who were too intent over their devotions to be conscious that any strangers were near and observing them. "If you will forgive my saying so, I should think you would have been glad to be able to join them in worshiping in as well as in admiring this building."

"I hope I can do that now. But I know what you mean," she said, answering perhaps more something within herself than any thing St. John had in his mind. "I know how sadly one feels our separations, and how one longs to be entirely in unison with those to whom so beautiful a building belongs. But it is no temptation to me," she continued, "rather the reverse—no more of one than that lovely mass you and Madge took me to hear in Farm Street."

"You cared so much for that, I was frightened we should get a scolding letter from Mr. Purvies for unsettling your religious principles. I am sure you would be glad to enjoy such a service every Sunday."

"Of course I should. But the very delight I take in Roman Catholic churches and services would make me mistrust any longing I had to have them as my own. I fancy some people *do* join the Church of Rome from their love for her beautiful services; but it would keep me back. I should be so frightened of seeking myself and pleasant feelings there, where, if anywhere, I ought only to have been seeking God. Fancy what an awakening it would be," she continued to herself, too low for St. John to catch her meaning, "to come to one's self and find that, after all, what we had mistaken for the call of the Holy Spirit was no more than a delight in what had merely touched the senses!"

From the cathedral to the station was but a step, and there they met Lady Margaret. An hour later they were all seated on the deck of a large Rhine steamer, which had picked them up at Bonn, and were prepared to enjoy some hours on the river, that pleasantest of all ways of traveling.

St. John knew by heart every story, whether legendary or historical, connected with the river they were slowly mounting; and Azalea was sufficiently a romantic young lady to be much interested in all the stories of knights and dragons, and faithful crusaders and convent-buried damsels.

"Those old days would have suited you, Azalea," said Madge. "You would have looked very graceful over your embroidery frame, and never have wanted to move while your absent knight, to whom you would have been as true as steel, was fighting the Saracens."

Azalea colored—a rare thing for her to do—at this allusion to her "absent knight."

Madge had spoken at random, as she so often did; but before her sentence was finished, the color in Azalea's face told her that she had made a mistake, and she said no more. Luckily at that moment St. John had turned to arrange Lady Margaret's shawl over her foot-stool, and neither heard her words nor saw the effect they produced on Azalea; so Madge thought no harm had been done.

To Azalea, every story of a lover's trials and steady faithfulness came laden with a potential personal application which none of the party but Madge suspected, and gave a fresh emphasis to her resolution that, come what might, be she opposed or trou-

bled by whomsoever, she would never, of her own will, put any insuperable barrier between herself and Harold.

There was little now that crossed Azalea's path which did not bring her love for and her resolution to be true to Harold strongly before her; and this was every day more and more the case. Her feelings were so much more definite than in those first three years of his absence, which she had spent in vague dreams at Dillon. Madge had drawn out Azalea very decidedly, and enabled her to understand herself and her feelings more distinctly than she had done in the cloudy atmosphere in which the two old scholars lived.

The months in London, when Madge had talked openly of its being her duty to renounce her cousin, followed by the offer she had received, brought marriage before her as a distinct fact, and not merely as a mirage of the November clouds. These two circumstances, though in themselves slight, had combined to develop Azalea from a visionary, pliable girl into a woman who, on one point at least, had a very decided idea and will of her own.

They reached Coblentz after some hours' steaming up the Rhine, and at once seated themselves in an open carriage, which had been previously ordered to take them the fifteen miles' drive to Ems, and that evening they settled down in the Hôtel des Quatre Tours.

Again, as soon as they had dined, the indefatigable Madge insisted on St. John smoking his evening cigar under the trees of the promenade. There an excellent band was playing Strauss's waltzes between the symphonies and other classical music which, though always appreciated in Germany, were then in England looked on as something between metaphysics and mathematics, and which it was considered even twenty years ago almost "blue" to admire.

A crowd of smart people, equaling in the magnificence of their dress that of Ostend, was listening to the band. The dark, shady walks, lighted up by countless lamps, which seemed only to throw the black shadow into deeper darkness, were thronged by pretty women and officers in every variety of uniform. The flickering light rested for one minute on an imperial-looking Russian, and next on the clearly defined profile of a trim little Parisian beauty, then fell on a pair of simple-looking and simply dressed English girls, and now again on a stout, substantial-looking German.

Our trio chose a shaded seat, unlighted by gas-lamps, and settled themselves within earshot of the music.

Of course, it was very warm; when is it otherwise at Ems—at any rate, during its three months' season? But heat was not unpleasant either to Azalea or Madge; and the former, to whom such a scene as the one before her was novel, and who had not since her childhood lived in a pretty country, was enchanted with even the comparatively tame beauty of Ems.

"Yes," said Madge, answering one of her exclamations of pleasure, "it's a sweet little place, particularly when set to such lovely music as that of this band. But I get tired of it, generally, before our six weeks are over. If the music could always be playing, I should never weary or find it dull; but though the band plays often, it can't be always at it; and when it doesn't play, the whole place feels flat. Music to my life is just what a favorable light and atmosphere are to a landscape. They can give beauty to the tamest and most uninteresting of plains; and I think music would enliven the dullest of existences."

"There must certainly be something like a dram in music," replied St. John. "Life is not quite real when you are listening to such a band as this. A small dose of opium could hardly for the time make all the ills of life appear less than that last symphony made me fancy them. Of course, one knows all the while that things are very bad, but the sting is taken from them, and they don't hurt in the least."

"But are they so very bad?" asked Azalea, to whom this was a new view, and who took every thing that was said rather more earnestly than was necessary.

"Of course they are," returned Madge. "Why, is it not very bad not to find the box one has ordered from Paris a fortnight ago not only not here, but not even started? And wasn't it very bad to have our things tossed about and made hay of at the Customhouse yesterday? And isn't it very bad for Reginald not to be a general yet, after his bad wound in the Crimea, and not to have discovered the heiress for whom I am sure he must be on the lookout; and a hundred other things from which music takes the bitterness?"

"Well, for such really terribly griefs as those you have mentioned, music may be soothing," said Azalea, laughing. "Though I don't think, if I were really unhappy, it would be any solace to me, but the reverse, I fear. Music rather intensifies every feeling than makes things pleasant, it seems to me."

"I don't think you ever will be really unhappy, you beautiful darling," said Madge, suddenly taking the lovingly admiring tone which she now and then adopted. "It would be too bad to see this smooth cheek worn by lines of care," she continued, stroking Azalea's cheek as she spoke. St. John looked as if he agreed from the bottom of his heart.

"What you say is true, Miss Chiltern," he answered. "I think, though music may

mitigate the lesser ills of life, it would aggravate real sorrow, in the same way that bright sunshine and sparkling talk will do."

"But why speak of real sorrow?" said Madge, impatiently. She had a morbid horror of discussing the possibility of grief. "It's nearly as bad as anticipating it, and that, in my eyes, is the eighth deadly sin. This comes of doing more in our talk than picking our neighbors to pieces. Come along to the rooms, and let us see if we can find the list of the people here."

"Let us watch the tables, then, Miss Chiltern, while Madge looks at the list," said St. John. "It is rather an amusing study of human nature. Look at that old woman —I have never been at Ems without seeing her seated in exactly that corner, and with the same bluey-green bonnet almost faded to white on her head. She understands what she is about, and makes enough during her three months here to keep her for the rest of the year. She never plays high; though, if you watch her, it's seldom but that at the end of an hour she is a little richer than when you first noticed her."

"And what becomes of her for the rest of the year?"

"I have not the vaguest idea. I can fancy her living somewhere up *au cinquième* in Paris, and using as much mind to make her winnings go a long way as she puts into the making of them here. I am sure she never dines without several *plats* and a good bottle of wine, and never spent a franc on any one but herself."

"And what will become of her when she's too old to come to the baths any longer?" asked Azalea. "You had better tell me how she is to end her days, and let me have her history complete."

"Oh, she will never be much older than she is now. The only thing that is likely to be fatal to her is this *régime* of virtue they talk of introducing, when the tables are to be abolished, and all of us transformed into such very good children. I should think my poor old friend will hardly survive the change, and will die of grief before she has time to die of starvation."

"Poor old woman! Tell me the history of the young man next her. You seem to know all about every body, and I like hearing even fancy histories of people. If they are not really true, they are, at any rate, typical, and what you tell me might have happened to them, so that I learn something of life by your stories."

"I would not be too eager to learn the ways of this wicked world, particularly at these gambling holes," answered St. John, who, being in love with Azalea, was anxious to keep her in a state of innocent ignorance, which he would have considered insipid in a woman for whom he only felt friendship.

"There's little chance of my learning much," answered Azalea. "In six weeks or so I shall be buried at Dillon again, and very little of the world or its wickedness is to be found there, so tell me something about that young man: he seems to watch the old woman very narrowly."

"I rather fancy he is a young Pole, who was at Baden last summer. He tried to break the bank, and broke himself instead, and now he means to keep to the safe kind of game the old lady plays. He puts on exactly the same stakes she does, and on the same colors, and now he has made that little pile of florins. But you can see how impatient he is; in a few minutes he will risk all the winnings of the afternoon. Look at his fingers fidgeting—there, all his money is now put on the chance of the black turning up; it's either double or quits with him and the bank. He's in luck to-night, and has doubled it in a moment, and now all chance of his playing soberly is over for this evening. See; he is risking his gains again, only with far less chance of winning; but if he does win, it will be four times what he has put on the table."

Azalea was getting interested.

"Oh, I hope he may!" she exclaimed, Father Abraham coming to the front in her character. "Yes, he has. What a lot of money they are pushing toward him!"

"He is lucky to-night, and, what is more wonderful, prudent too, for he knows when to leave off. He has had enough play for to-night, and won't tempt his luck any more."

"How sorry the old lady must be that she did not follow his example! It is much pleasanter to make your money all at once, than to toil on, making or losing a few florins at a time."

"Not she. She knows hers is by far the safer game, and these episodes of luck are as much out of her line as they are out of yours. She wins more than the hundred and twenty pounds the Pole carried off in a year, and never risks any thing, to speak of."

"Has the Pole really won a hundred and twenty pounds?" asked Azalea, in amazement. "Oh, dear me, I *do* wish gambling were not wrong!"

"Why, are you so anxious, then, to win a hundred and twenty pounds?" said St. John, laughing. "It's not so very wicked; but it's so uncertain, that's the worst of it. If I could always count on winning, I should be always playing."

"I have no doubt about its being wrong; Uncle John thinks it so," said Azalea, in the decided tone she always used when questions of morals arose; her standard being usually much higher than that of her present companions. "But if it were not, I should very much like to play. Fancy being able to win a hundred and twenty pounds in a minute in that way!"

Azalea was thinking that Harold need not be toiling in India for the money to buy Chiltern, if it could be made after such a speedy fashion by playing at the tables.

"Has either of you made or lost a fortune since you have been watching the play?" asked Madge, who now joined them. "I am always so unlucky—I have never won a florin—so it's no use my trying to recover from the extravagances of last season by coming here. What! has neither of you tried your luck at all? Ah! that, I am sure, is the fault of my pretty little Goody Two-shoes, who thinks it wicked. She looks as if she were in what I call her 'Gregorian chant' mood, which means, being extra severe on the naughty world around her. Well, never mind about the play. I have found the names of a few people we know, so I dare say it won't be so very dull, even without gambling."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The days followed one another quickly and monotonously at Ems. The life was a very pleasantly idle one. Neither of the younger ladies drank the waters, but they sat out in shady groves and woods, sketching and reading, and went long donkey expeditions in the woods; and, as he was allowed, always and on all occasions, to be their guide and protector, St. John became convinced that there was no imaginable pleasure in life greater than that of escorting ladies to the German baths.

His days were almost entirely spent in long *têtes-à-têtes* with Azalea. Even when no large number of friends joined them, Madge generally contrived that a fourth should be of their party; for she was not fond of playing the part of a dummy, and equally indisposed to disturb by her talk the flourishing friendship which was progressing so fast between her friend and her cousin. When she failed in this, she still managed that the two should spend the day practically alone. She would listen to the reading, but allow all comments to be made by Azalea; or she would choose a sketch at some distance from the point of view fixed on by the latter, and insist that St. John should remain near Azalea; and thus in no way did she interfere with them.

As usual, Azalea's beauty attracted great admiration, and at first she was besieged by those anxious to be introduced to her. But, as St. John held his ground firmly, and was always with her or near her, the outsiders gradually receded, and soon ceased to trouble her with unwelcome attention. It was no fun to dance attendance on a young lady, however beautiful, who evidently preferred another; and it soon became the accepted opinion at Ems that St. John and Miss Chiltern were engaged.

Azalea, who always acted simply, and without any *arrière pensée* as to how others might construe her conduct, gave St. John as much quiet encouragement as even Madge could wish. She frankly thought him the most agreeable man in the place, and as he seemed to like to be with her, why should she in any way try to hinder his coming? She was too little used to the meaning of things in society to attach the right one to his evident wish to be always with her. Had the shadow of an idea crossed her mind that the world considered her engaged to St. John, she would have been horrified, and drawn back from all friendship whatsoever with him. But the very ignorance which St. John so much prized misled her.

It did not, however, altogether mislead him. Kind as she was to him, in perfect sympathy as they were one with the other, yet there was still that something in her manner which had prevented his proposing in London. She was too kind, too calmly and evenly kind, too much and too always entirely at her ease with him; and at the end of three weeks it was still the same. They were then so intimate as to make all their intercourse pleasant in the extreme. They were on what may be called "shorthand" terms. It was unnecessary for them to enlarge on subjects, or to amplify on any topic. With half a word they understood each other's meaning, and could mutually enter into the spirit of the rejoinder.

This was all very delightful to St. John, as far as it went; but here were three weeks of their stay past, and he had got no farther. He must really brace himself up for the effort.

Each morning he determined to throw the die and win or lose every thing; but for some days, each evening found him with his purpose still unfulfilled. How could he risk the loss of such pleasant days? Days spent in sitting in green woods, reading poetry to a lovely girl whom he absolutely worshiped; whose mind was in perfect sympathy with his own, or, if they chanced to differ, with whom discussions were even more delightful than perfect agreement. He was a coward, he told himself every morning; but a coward the evening still found him.

At length a reason presented itself for ending his uncertainty.

On returning one day from a long morning in the woods for the five-o'clock *table-d'hôte*, he found that a small box had arrived for him during his absence. This box contained a copy of Botticelli's angel in the National Gallery, which he had ordered after hearing Azalea admire it and express a wish to possess a copy.

He had almost contrived to lose a bet *à propos* of some trifling controversy which

had arisen out of the book they were reading; now the payment had arrived in a form which he felt sure would give her pleasure. He would give her the picture when they were alone, watch the effect his present had on her, and, if it were not very discouraging, he would then and there pour out his tale.

Was it possible that within a few hours he should be the happiest of men? to use a hackneyed phrase, the full force of which he had never before felt. He hardly dared hope it; but, nevertheless, humming to himself in such cases the oft-repeated lines,

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all,"

he ran down the hotel stairs, fully purposing that it should only be the fault of accident if he remounted them with his fate still uncertain.

There was a secluded little summer-house in the garden where they were in the habit of retiring for coffee after dinner. On this evening Lady Margaret, being tired, had said she should dine in her own room: the fates would be unusually perverse if, under these circumstances, Madge did not go to her mother for half an hour before they started for their evening stroll, and this would leave Azalea and St. John to take their coffee together in the garden. Madge would not be tiresome enough to change this their ordinary routine, and leave her mother alone for the whole evening. She had sufficient insight into his feelings, Reginald was convinced, to guess how much he wished to be with Azalea, and how he prized the moments they were alone. He was beginning to have altogether a higher and better opinion of Madge. She was really a good girl, and showed considerable tact in the manner in which she managed never to be in the way, and yet never obviously to take any pains to be out of it, nor to allow her companions to become conspicuous. How far Madge's wishes were in harmony with his own hopes was unsuspected by him.

The day had been very warm, and Azalea was somewhat paler than usual, as, dressed in her soft white muslin, she came in to *table-d'hôte* with Madge. She sat between her two companions, and did not talk much at dinner. Madge was engrossed with a German officer who sat on her other side, and St. John was not indisposed for silence. Extreme paleness was not unbecoming to Azalea, and languor was also in keeping with the grandeur of her beauty. She was looking her best.

"Quel dommage que les demoiselles Anglaises sont toujours si fières!" a Frenchman said to a smart little Parisian, whom he was treating to a good dinner at the best hotel in the place.

"Ou si bêtes," was the rejoinder. "Sans doute elle est bien belle; mais elle n'a pas dit deux mots pendant tout le dîner, et son cavalier n'est pas mal."

As they rose from the table, Madge said,

"I will tell Warren to take your coffee to the arbor, and will join you in less than an hour. I will have mine in mother's room—she has been alone all day."

"I think I will go to Lady Margaret when you leave, Madge," said Azalea. "It's too hot to go to the rooms to-night."

"But have your coffee first out-of-doors, at any rate," answered Madge, whose quick eye had detected an expression of annoyance passing across her cousin's face, as Azalea suggested a different way of passing the evening from the ordinary one.

The garden, though small, was so planned as to make as many private and secluded walks as possible. One of the walks ended abruptly in a summer-house, which was furnished with a few chairs and a small table, from the front of which you looked straight down a short grass alley, shaded on either side by acacia and other trees. In the centre of the grass shone what appeared to be a large ball of quicksilver on a stand, which, I suppose, in those lands must be considered ornamental; its utility is difficult to discover.

Down these paths and to this summer-house St. John and Azalea retired as Madge left them. They could hear the river running close to them, the evening light was closing in, the moon was shining on the cockneyfied glass ball—the scene, considering its locality in a hotel garden at a fashionable spa, might easily have been less romantic.

"Will you open and bring to me the case that came for me this afternoon?" said St. John to the servant who brought the coffee. "You must allow me to discharge a debt of honor," he went on to Azalea. "Have you forgotten the bet I lost to you last week?"

"Did you lose a bet?" said Azalea, dreamily. "But if you did, I don't want to be paid. If you lost, we only bet because you were so positive. I wanted to show that you were for once really in the wrong."

"You succeeded in doing that, and here comes your punishment. You can not be always victorious without occasionally suffering for it," he answered, smiling, as the man brought him the small box, in which was firmly fixed the angel's head, beautifully copied, and mounted in a frame which St. John had himself carefully designed before he left London.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked, as he removed the lid, and allowed the evening light to shine on the angel's most angelic

face, and to lighten up every tender and earnest line in its intense expression.

"Recognize it!" exclaimed Azalea, in delighted surprise. "Indeed I do! I shall never forget that face, and this is a most successful copy."

St. John was watching her narrowly. She had not changed color, but her face had brightened with delighted interest, and her eyes were so riveted on the picture that he could watch her without her guessing how closely she was being observed. Was she really so engrossed by the gift as to forget the presence of the giver? St. John must make an effort to bring himself more forcibly before her.

"You must reverse the order of things," he said, "and reward me for being in the wrong the other day, by hanging this little picture in your room."

"Is this to be the result of our bet?" asked Azalea. "Is this really to be my own? I hardly know how to thank you enough; nothing could have given me greater pleasure," she continued, her quiet manner showing more animation than usual, but with her eyes and attention still more fixed on the angel than on her companion. "How could you guess so exactly what I should like? I am very, very grateful."

"When you are forever thinking of a person, it is not difficult to guess their tastes; and it is seldom that you are out of my thoughts. My plans, wishes, prayers, and longings seem all to centre round you, to begin and end only in you." He spoke quietly, though with much suppressed energy.

Azalea looked up quickly, with surprise and astonishment plainly written on her face; and as he caught her expression, he almost wished he had never thought of any thing beyond friendship with Azalea. As he spoke, it seemed all at once presumptuous of him to hope to win this sweet girl as his own. He looked despairingly out on to the grass, hoping for some inspiration to tell him how to proceed; but there nothing met his view but two men, smoking their evening cigars.

As he watched them they parted, and the taller of the two, who had been facing them for half a minute, threw the end of his cigar into a bush, and leisurely approached the spot where Azalea and St. John were sitting. Was St. John to be interrupted, with his tale only just begun? The chance of this happening revived his courage; he had determined that this evening should end his uncertainty, and he would not be thwarted. These changes of feeling had not taken forty seconds of actual time; and he turned to Azalea to speak more plainly, and force from her an answer.

But what a change had these few instants worked in her! A thrill of hope, nay, of delighted certainty that he was loved, ran through him as he now looked at Azalea. She had at length caught the meaning of his words, and of all his past devotion, and the answering love was clearly written in her sudden change of countenance.

As St. John turned to her, her complexion changed from even a deadlier white than usual to a brighter crimson than he had ever seen in her, which suffused her face and neck, and then as quickly subsided, leaving only a bright-red spot on each cheek: her large eyes were dilated, her lips were parted. That some sudden and powerful emotion was affecting her it was impossible to doubt, and could St. John be wrong in supposing it to be the result of his words? He was not unduly sanguine, but now he could not but hope, he could not but feel, that his half-spoken love was answered in Azalea's face. He gazed on her in a delighted trance; his hand was raised to clasp her in his arms. "Dearest Azalea, won at last!" were the words trembling on his lips, when the stranger, who had been walking toward the arbor (the inside of which in the gathering twilight was in such darkness as to prevent him from seeing it was tenanted, though he himself was clearly visible to those within), entered, and stopped St. John from uttering the words on his lips.

The intruder, however, as he passed under the trailing vine which formed the doorway of this Arcadian retreat, became conscious that it was not empty, and was retiring with a hasty "I beg your pardon," when Azalea, who, as he turned, rose quickly from her seat, with a low cry exclaimed, "Oh, stop him!" in an under-voice, which excitement seemed to prevent her being able to raise.

The stranger, however, seemed to have been struck by her cry. He turned and hesitated a second—long enough for Azalea to leave her place by St. John, move hastily forward, and seize her cousin Harold by the arm.

They neither of them spoke for a minute: delighted wonder and astonishment were written on both their faces; and the picture now before him was never effaced from St. John's brain, where in that minute it burned itself through and through. Before him was a tall, dark-haired man, with a face whose manly beauty even in his agony he could not deny, looking down with delighted love into the beautiful, sensitive face below him, every nerve of which was palpitating with untold and unlooked-for joy.

"Well," he said to himself, as he turned away with a feeling that he had better hide himself from the haunts of men, "I only wish Millais could have seen that. What a *pendant* it would have made to 'The Huguenots.' Yes, you would see how she had

thought of him and mourned for him as dead; and this would be his unexpected return. Well, if I have lost my chance of a wife, I have at least seen a pretty picture."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WHERE have you dropped from, my own darling?" were Harold's first words, as he recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to speak.

"Oh, Harold, how did you come here?" was Azalea's questioning answer.

"Mine is a very simple story. Mrs. Macgregor's health broke down, and she was ordered home; Mr. Macgregor could not leave at once, and so I was commissioned to establish Mrs. Macgregor here; and as it got me home a month earlier than I expected, I was very glad to be of use."

"Mine is still simpler. I have been here the last three weeks with Lady Margaret and Madge."

"What a piece of luck it is," returned Harold, "that we have met to-night! Fancy what I should have felt had I arrived at Dillon and found you were not there; and I was in such a hurry to see you that I meant to try and get off to-morrow. Now I feel that I can do my duty thoroughly by Mrs. Macgregor. I sha'n't in the least mind stopping to see how the waters suit her," he said, smiling. "My own Azalea, what a pleasure it is to see you again! You are more beautiful than ever, my own," he continued, looking at her with loving pride. "I will stand no more partings from you. God has been very good to us, dearest, and brought us together once more; and may he do so, and more also, if aught but death part you and me," he added, gravely.

"Oh, Harold, is that possible?" said Azalea, half frightened at his words, and a feeling of shyness taking the place of astonishment.

"It shall be possible. You be a good girl, and do exactly as I tell you, as you always used to do, and it shall be possible. Come and sit down a little. What a great deal we shall have to say to one another! Four years is a long time to have been parted."

And, so saying, he drew Azalea to the arbor, which was now empty, St. John having made his escape unobserved by the cousins, and was by this time rapidly climbing one of the neighboring hills.

The Angel's head was still lying on the table beside the empty coffee-cups, and all externally was the same; but what a change had a few minutes wrought in Azalea's feelings! The sight of these signs of the life of ten minutes ago brought the change more forcibly before her. The uncertainty of the future seemed now to have vanished, the void was filled, and she saw a vista of complete happiness opening before her.

We often dwell on the effect little things may have on us as seen through the medium of a great sorrow, which suddenly has changed the color of all around us; but does not joy effect an equally quick transformation? There lay the picture, the glove her hand had been trifling with, the rose she had laid down as she sprung forward to meet her cousin; but how changed was all besides! Harold instead of St. John; rose, nay, pomegranate color, instead of gray—sober, serviceable gray—kind, friendly gray, but still passionless gray to Azalea's eyes.

She sat by Harold's side, his arm clasping her waist, and listened to a fuller account of his journey and arrival at Ems, and not a thought of her late companion crossed her mind.

She had liked St. John much, doubtless; and when calmer moments should follow the present excited ones, she would gladly fall back to precisely the same place of intimate friendship which had existed between them before her cousin's arrival. But he was altogether so outside her innermost thoughts and feelings, and she had so completely forgotten his existence, that she did not even notice his absence, or form any conjecture as to how he had vanished.

She sat close by her cousin, hardly speaking, happily listening to his caressing words, and now and then pressing the large, strong hand within which her own lay.

Half an hour passed: and now but for the moonlight it would have been quite dark, when Madge came quickly down the lawn toward them.

"I am sorry to have kept you so long," she said, as she came up to the arbor where she imagined St. John to be still sitting with Azalea. "My mother has gone to bed; we may as well come to the rooms."

Neither of the cousins spoke.

"Won't you come?" continued Madge.

"Oh, Madge," exclaimed Azalea, suddenly rising and coming out into the full moonlight, "don't you remember him?"

Harold followed her.

Madge took a long look at him.

"Harold Chiltern!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "So," she muttered to herself, "all my most promising schemes are upset."

"Harold, how *did* you come here?"

The story was soon told over again. "And this reminds me," said Harold as he finished, "that I have forgotten my duty of looking after Mrs. Macgregor—even her very existence. May I come back to you, Madge, in ten minutes? I must just go and tell her what it is that must keep me for the rest of the evening."

"Come to Number 35, and we will have tea," said Madge, in a friendly voice.

She felt sure that she had lost her game; but there was no need to quarrel with the cousins, or to be sulky in consequence, and they might as well have a pleasant evening together.

"What have you done with Reginald, Azalea?" she asked. "I left you *tête-à-tête*, and find you *tête-à-tête*—but with a difference."

"Indeed with a difference!" answered Azalea, with a bright and joyous smile such as Madge had never yet seen beaming in her face, and which forced her to suspect that she was mistaken when she decided that Azalea felt no warmer love than a sister's for Harold. "Oh, Madge, isn't it delightful that Harold should have come here? Such a lucky accident, too, our meeting! If he had not chanced to come to our hotel, he might have started off to-morrow morning, and we should never have known of his being here."

"But what have you done with Reginald?" persisted Madge.

"Colonel St. John?" said Azalea, awakening to the remembrance of his existence. "To be sure, he was here; but I did not see him after Harold came. Ah, there's my Angel's head, too, I had forgotten," she said, returning to the bower. "Look, Madge, what I have got by winning that bet last week—this beautiful Angel of Botticelli's. It's too dark to see it now; we must take it in and look at it by the lamp."

"Did poor Reginald send to London for that copy for you?" asked Madge.

"Yes; and it only came this afternoon. Was it not kind of Colonel St. John to guess so exactly what I should like? I wonder where he has gone. He would like to see Harold, I dare say."

"I am sure he would like nothing of the kind," muttered Madge. "I don't fancy the ostentatious happiness of these reunited young lovers will be at all to his taste."

Azalea was far too engrossed with her own thoughts to heed any but the most direct questions; so, without further remark, they returned to the hotel, and were soon joined by Harold.

"I have seen Mrs. Macgregor," he said, "and told her I sha'n't mind stopping till the end of the week; and by that time, Azalea, you will be ready to come home with me, sha'n't you?"

"I am ready whenever you choose to take me," said the compliant Azalea.

"Come, Harold, this is rather too bad of you!" expostulated Madge. "To drop down from the clouds in this way is all very well, but you must not break up our pleasant party. We must stop here another fortnight, and I sha'n't let Azalea go till we ourselves leave."

"I wish I could please you, Madge," answered Harold. "But I have not seen my father for four years, and must not delay longer than is necessary in going to him."

"Then you must leave Azalea here."

"That's impossible, I am afraid," he answered, looking, with a smile, at Azalea. "You know, or will soon know, that Azalea and I are as good as man and wife, and I don't mean to stand any more separations—no, not for a week even."

At this blunt announcement of their positive engagement even Azalea started, and Madge's last hopes of being a real Chiltern of Chiltern vanished as she answered:

"*Monsieur, je vous félicite.* There's nothing like being on the spot early in the day. None of the London men have had a chance of winning the most beautiful girl that has been brought out for a long time."

"I am very sorry for them; but I can't be so obliging as to think of resigning Azalea to any of them."

"I suppose not," said Madge, with a half-sigh. "But you must listen to reason, Harold, about taking Azalea home. We are responsible for her to her uncle; and we could not dream of allowing her to travel across Europe with you, and no proper chaperon."

"Don't be absurd, my dear Madge, there's a good girl," replied Harold, assuming much the same tone in speaking to her that he had used ten years ago, when they were boy and girl friends. "After having taken far more care than any one else of Azalea for years, I am not going to be put off with any bugbears about chaperons. I should like to know who has a better right to take care of Azalea than I have?"

"You may think no one has, but I can assure you that there the world won't agree with you."

"Then, my dear Madge, I can't help the world," answered Harold, with the quiet superiority and strength of will which generally succeeded in winning all it wished. "I won't even allow that there is sufficient doubt to make it a matter for argument. There's no question at all about it, so don't conjure up one out of that inventive brain of yours, which I see is as full of fancies as ever."

Madge was silenced for the time being, and was altogether out of spirits.

"I think I had better go and write a letter," she said, a little later on. "You can send word to my room, Azalea, when tea comes in."

"Is there any thing in what Madge says, Harold?" asked Azalea, when the former had left them.

"Nothing in the world, my pretty," he answered, assuringly. "Don't take up any of Madge's fancies, there's a darling. Why, didn't I take care of you at Dillon wherever you went? and don't I mean to do so for the rest of our lives, my sweet one? When do you think we can be married, Azalea?

That's what is uppermost in my mind just now."

"Oh, Harold, I never thought any thing of that kind could be really near. Why, you have not told your father, or got possession of Chiltern yet. How does it stand about Chiltern, Harold?"

"I am afraid I can't have Chiltern this year; and I am more doubtful than I was when I went away that I ever shall get it. But I mean to have you, at any rate, my own."

"But, Harold, shall not I interfere with your chance of getting back the Chase? You can far more easily make a fortune without a wife than with one."

"Perhaps so; but, for all that, you must not thwart me now, darling. I thought it out last year, and made up my mind. It isn't that I care less for Chiltern than I did, only as one gets older one cares so much more for something else—something more real and lasting than any old family place; and you can guess what that is, Azalea."

"My love?" she asked, timidly.

"Yes, dearest. You would not have me weigh in the same balance a woman's true love and a house and park, would you?"

"I don't know. The thought of having Chiltern used to be so much to you."

"And so it is still. Only I know more now than I did when I left home. I know that eighty thousand pounds is not to be had for the wishing, or even at once for the working. And then, too, as one grows older, one's tastes become less material. I am afraid I used to look on a wife as secondary to Chiltern; but I am quite sure I don't now," he said, pressing Azalea to his side. "You won't mind a few years in India with me, darling?"

"I shall mind nothing with you, Harold. Then, what are we to do?"

"Get married as soon as we can, my pretty one. That's the first thing we must do; and then we must take a nut-shell of a house in or near London for a few years, and I must go to the City every morning, and you must stop at home and watch for me in the evening. Then, when Mr. Macgregor has done with me at home, we shall go out to Calcutta, or anywhere the firm may choose to send us, and if we are very lucky, we may yet end our days at Chiltern. There's no knowing what may turn up. I have been wonderfully lucky so far. I have got five thousand pounds in my pocket, and a place worth eight hundred a year in the Macgregors' house; so you see I have begun well."

"And when do you think you will go back to India?"

"That's uncertain. I am quite at the disposal of the firm. What should you say, Azalea, if some day I were lucky enough to be sent out there as junior partner? Such a thing *might* happen, and that would be my chance of winning Chiltern. I could never do it out of my salary. But the way these big firms do is this," he continued: "a younger brother or son has to do the work out in Calcutta or China for some years, and then he comes home and works the City house, and takes his ease, comparatively, and another youngster takes his place in Calcutta. My friend Macgregor has now worked his time in the East, and is coming home to end his days comfortably at Roehampton, driving into the City three or four days a week; and it is through his kindness I get home now. He got used to me in India, and I did his work as he liked to have it done. So, for the present, I am to be his confidential clerk. It was great luck my going out in the same steamer as Mrs. Macgregor. I will introduce you to her to-morrow. She's not a bad little woman, though always overdressed."

"And when shall you be a partner, Harold? Ought we not to wait to be married till you are one?"

"No, my darling, that will never do, seeing the chances are I never shall be one. It would be a piece of good fortune I must not in any way count on. My only chance would be that a son or nephew of one of the partners wished to go out, and that I stepped into his berth. Sometimes the young fellows in families of that kind take it into their heads to insist on going into the army, by way of being greater gentlemen than their belongings. It's very foolish, but very useful to men like myself, who can in no way be hurt by business or improved by a uniform."

"Does business hurt any one?" asked Azalea. "If it does, one half of me must be very bad indeed, for my grandfather used to be counting over money all day."

"So your uncle Orlando is dead?"

"Yes, he died two years ago, and my poor old grandfather is all alone with Maddalena. Some day, Harold, do take me to see him. I ought to go; he was good to me when I was a little girl. I can't bear to think of him so lonely, and I leading the kind of life I have had this summer; but I could not help it."

"We will go this very autumn—you shall never ask in vain for any thing, dear. We must have a few weeks to ourselves after we are married, and we will spend them at Lugano."

"How delightful, Harold!" exclaimed Azalea, clapping her hands, and feeling that life was being brought out of the hazy English downs into the clear, joyous Italian sunshine, in which even a marriage with Harold could be seen in the future as a practical fact, and not as a mere misty, hopeless dream.

"But your father—what will he say?

I don't think he will ever consent to your marrying me and settling in a little house in London, and going to the City every day, and with only me for a wife. If you had come back with Chiltern in your pocket, he might have forgiven you for going into business; but to come to a City life—why, an attic and starvation in a college quadrangle would please his imagination better."

"Leave me to manage my father. Even if I have not yet done all I hoped, I have done a great deal more than I ever should have done by stopping at home."

The entrance of tea, followed by Madge, stopped any further talk as to their plans, and soon they separated for the night.

CHAPTER XXV.

St. John, after deciding that for once he had seen the art of Millais surpassed in nature, quickly, and unnoticed, left the hotel garden, and took the first path leading up the hill, and away through the secluded woods to its summit.

There he laid himself down on the turf, and, notwithstanding his rapid exertion in mounting the hill, he began to breathe a little more freely, now that he could inhale the fresher air of the hill-top, with no stifling trees around him.

He lay on the grass, gazing up into the glorious starlit sky overhead, and tried his best to quiet his troubled spirit into the philosophical calm which he had so often determined nothing should seriously disturb.

"I am no worse off than I was a year ago," he argued with himself; "but, all the same, I would give the world to be able to spend the next few months on active service. What a fool I am to mind a love disappointment! No better than a mere boy," he continued, impatiently, to himself. "Now, I will give myself three hours up here, and if by that time I am not fit for general society, I may as well disgrace myself altogether and run off to Baden."

And he lay on the grass, thinking of what he had lost; trying to believe that, after all, it was for the best that he should never marry; wondering how or why the cousin of whom he had heard so much had so unexpectedly appeared on the scene; and feeling surprised that, often as Azalea had talked of Harold to him, he never should have before guessed that it was as a lover, and not merely as a cousin, that she looked for his return.

He never had suspected it, though the truth had been fully revealed to him in the moment of their meeting. He doubted it as little now as he had been unsuspecting before; and all that had puzzled him in Azalea's conduct toward himself and others now became clear.

"Well," he said at length aloud, as a distant clock sounded midnight, "even if I do go down now, I shall not have to meet any of them to-night. Unless, indeed," he went on, bitterly, "this young couple find going to bed impossible, and sit up all night discussing their happiness. But that's not what I mean," he said, impatiently; "any exhibition of bitterness will be more ridiculous than open sorrow. What's the use of determining on one line of conduct, when, even out here by myself, I can not be true to it? Nothing will look more foolish or boyish than any show of anger or pique. I have not been ill-treated, and ought not to behave as if I thought myself so. Kind friendliness is to be my *rôle*, and I risk my self-esteem on keeping it up."

With this determination, he slowly descended the hill, and made his way, unobserved, to the hotel; and, thanks, perhaps, to his night vigil, and to a strong will, was able next morning to meet his friends without betraying either annoyance or regret.

Madge was almost startled at seeing him re-appear so unchanged from the previous day; and began to wonder if she had been mistaken, and that Harold's return had been no blow to him. She had so little self-command that, judging from herself, she was slow to believe that others could feel more than they disclosed.

St. John greeted Azalea in his usual manner.

"I was sorry to disappear so abruptly last evening," he said, bowing over her hand. "But, as I at once guessed that your cousin had unexpectedly returned, I thought that you would be glad that a stranger should withdraw."

The only change in his manner was a slight increase of ceremonial courtesy.

"You were very thoughtful," replied Azalea. "But allow me to make my cousin known to you, and then I hope we need not consider ourselves as strangers."

She spoke with such finished and graceful ease that both Madge and Harold were struck with the change a few months spent in society had worked in her manner; and the latter could not help feeling a pang of regret, in the midst of his happiness, that this grand-looking young creature, with manners befitting an empress, should not at once be installed in the fine old halls of Chiltern. The suburban nut-shell he had talked of the evening before seemed inconsistent with this queen-like girl.

They had a quiet breakfast, at which most of the talking was done by Harold and Madge.

"Will you allow me to introduce Mrs. Macgregor to you this morning?" he asked

her, as they finished. "She will be lonely here, and very glad of your acquaintance. They have been exceedingly kind to me, and you will oblige me by being friendly to her."

"By all means," answered Madge. "I am going to finish a sketch up the hill; we may as well all go together, and we can ask Mrs. Macgregor to join us. Azalea, you go with Harold and find out if she would like to come, while Reggy and I see about donkeys. Tell her to be ready by eleven o'clock."

"But, Madge," said Harold, "you will take her in hand, won't you — you and Colonel St. John? You won't let her interfere with Azalea and me?"

"Well, I am sure! You always were the coolest boy imaginable. So poor Reginald and I are to be bored, that you and Azalea may have a morning of uninterrupted bliss."

Madge spoke half pettishly; but she was laughing, too, at Harold's quiet way of wishing Mrs. Macgregor to be of their party, and yet of putting from him all the trouble of amusing her. It was only part and parcel of the conduct to be expected from young lovers who threw to the winds every consideration beyond themselves.

"I know your good-nature of old, Madge," was Harold's laughing reply.

Mrs. Macgregor meanwhile had heard with satisfaction that her young escort had met with old friends, and was delighted at the prospect of an introduction which might be as useful to her as one to Lady Margaret Lifford.

Now that she was returning for good to England, she must make up her mind no longer to be a queen in second-rate society, but must seek, if possible, to become a humble member of really good society. She therefore welcomed the introduction which Harold had suggested, and was prepared to patronize and be very gracious to his cousin.

When, however, Azalea entered her room, tall and imperial-looking, and, though wishing to be cordial to one who had so substantially befriended Harold, yet not able to be actually warm in her manner to an entire stranger, little Mrs. Macgregor seemed quite dwarfed. She began to feel almost meek, and entirely unlike the lady who could lord it over a P. and O. steamer, or a Calcutta drawing-room. All her little flounces and pink bows seemed trivial and vulgar beside Azalea's simple and long-flowing white skirt, and the arrangement of lace and ribbon on her head was altogether ineffective when contrasted with Azalea's coronet of deep auburn hair. She began to think she had never been to a really good milliner — she was hardly sufficiently instructed to know that it was beyond the power of any dress-maker to produce the effect of Azalea's appearance.

Mrs. Macgregor was much pleased at the prospect of joining the donkey-party. It would throw her and her new friends together in the intimate way that she considered desirable, and Colonel St. John appeared to be all she could wish for as an escort. She could see him now from her window, lounging in the sunshine, a picture of high-bred ease and nonchalance, and decided at once that she could allow Harold to be monopolized by his cousin, if his place at her side was to be taken by St. John.

"I am glad you will come with us," said Azalea, graciously. "I don't suppose you are used to donkey-riding, but it is very pleasant. The donkeys here are so very fine, too; they must be almost as good as those Harold described in Egypt."

"Ah, you heard of our expedition to the Pyramids. We had a charming day there."

"So interesting a one, that after it, I fear, our poor little hills will have few attractions for you. But, at any rate, a donkey-ride is better than sitting in the hotel all the morning."

"Yes, it is very much better; so I will not keep you waiting, but be quite ready at eleven."

"Look here, Madge," said St. John, in the evening, "I can't stand another day on duty with that overdressed and under-bred little woman."

The day had been one of perfect happiness to Azalea and Harold, as, early in the morning, they had succeeded in losing the other three, and had been fortunate enough not to find them again until it was time to return to dinner.

"Come, Reggy, don't be unfair to poor Mrs. Macgregor. Of course, to-day, anyhow, life must have been rather a bore, with whomsoever we had spent it; but we had to get through it somehow. On the whole, it was just as well we had a third with us, if only to keep us from quarreling. In our present mood, if we had been alone, we should have done nothing but spar all day. Harold is the one to blame, for dropping down on us in this way, and spoiling our pleasant party."

St. John would not trust himself to say what he thought of Harold, and only asked,

"How long does he stop?"

"Till the day after to-morrow, I believe. Then he takes Azalea home to Dillon, and I suppose they will be married before the winter sets in. That's to say, if Mr. Chiltern is not one too many for them. I fancy he will think his son is throwing himself away."

"Will he, indeed!" said St. John, scornfully. "Is there any thing good enough for this young paragon in the eyes of his family?"

"I don't suspect there is, in Mr. Chiltern's eyes, or even in Azalea's."

"And Miss Chiltern is to settle down as a City clerk's wife, and be patronized by Mrs. Macgregor for the rest of her life?"

"I don't think any one will find it easy to patronize Azalea," answered Madge.

"I am thankful to say I don't think they will. How this young fellow can have the audacity to think of himself as Miss Chiltern's husband is more than I can master."

"I am afraid the fault is half hers. She gives him such good reason to think he will content her as a husband."

"Well, it's no concern of ours," said Reginald, philosophically. "Only I won't play the part of *cavalier seul* to Mrs. Macgregor another day."

"I will introduce her to some men at the rooms this evening, and you sha'n't be bored again. Of course," she added, "the way things have turned out is a nuisance to all of us; but I will see they shall be so as little as possible to you."

Madge now felt almost guilty toward her cousin.

If she had only warned him as to the state of Azalea's feelings three months ago, he might have been spared the pain she knew he now suffered. She had meant to befriend him; but, not being omnipotent, when it came to the point she had been unable to do so; and all along she had thought more of her own selfish aims than of the risk of disappointment he ran.

"Thank you, Madge; you are a good-natured girl. I don't think I could stand a second morning like to-day's," he said.

He had not to do so.

The next morning was stormy, and he could sit quietly in his room and try to read, while the young lovers had possession of Lady Margaret's room; and early the following day—after a kind "Farewell" from Lady Margaret; a half-indignant, half-affectionate one from Madge, who insisted that they must wait to be married till she could be at Chiltern to give Azalea away; and a courteous and rather unnecessarily ceremonious "Good-bye" from St. John—the cousins took their departure.

They left early enough to reach London by the following morning, and they hoped to arrive at Dillon in the evening.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ALTHOUGH railways had spread fast in most directions since Azalea's arrival at Dillon ten years ago, even now none came nearer than five miles to that secluded spot; so the cousins had a long drive together across the country, from the little wayside station in the middle of Salisbury Plain, where they had left the train.

The sun was shining brightly, and the sky overhead was cloudless. A soft autumnal breeze was wafting the light thistle-down in all directions. The downs were looking their best, and although on such dark days as the one on which the cousins had parted they were dreary and melancholy enough, on this bright August afternoon they formed, if not altogether a radiant landscape, at any rate a quietly pleasing one. The undulating horizon, of which nothing broke the line; the soft, browny-green turf gently rising and falling on either side of the white chalk road along which they were being driven; the large tracts of heather, among which flocks of sheep were grazing on the short, sweet grass—all so familiar and yet for so long unseen, formed a very pleasing prospect to Harold.

"There's nothing like one's native heather, after all!" he exclaimed, as he threw off his hat and allowed the breeze to play among his short curly hair. "What would I not have given for a whiff of this down air last September in Calcutta! I was never so near being stifled. The hot weather is bad enough, but the damp mugginess of the rains is far worse. I suppose, however, if we are to keep the idea of Chiltern before us, we shall have to spend a good many rainy seasons in India. I don't know if even for the sake of the old place I ought to run the risk of taking you to that fever-nest."

"Yes, yes, you must," said Azalea. "We must do every thing in our power to make the necessary money. Fancy what I should feel if I ever really stood in your way of winning the Chase!"

"Well, I don't know that now I should be quite in despair if I didn't. The more I see of the world, the more I understand that, although Dillon is far inferior to Chiltern, there are many worse places."

"Of course there are. Only you have set your heart on the best place, you know, and I fear you will be a disappointed man if it is never yours. And then, when I am old and ugly, Chiltern will still be as beautiful as ever, and you will be sorry you bartered it away for a withered old woman."

"Shall I?" he asked, smiling, and passing his arm round her waist. "Look me in the face truthfully, and tell me that you really believe that I shall ever compare the one with the other. Ah! I knew you would not be able to stand that test. But I will tell you what I do believe. When you see how very small your drawing-room is at Peckham, or Norwood, or some such place, you will begin to pine after all the grandeur of Kirkwell."

"Of Kirkwell!" exclaimed Azalea, blushing crimson. "Who can have told you any

thing about Kirkwell? I never mentioned the place, or any thing about it, to Madge."

"I know you didn't, darling; but Madge has got eyes, and so have I, and had I ever doubted that hers had told her the truth, my own would now have assured me that she was right. You can't look quite so indifferent as you wish, my pretty one. And so you had the strength of mind to refuse Kirkwell, and all the glories of being a baronet's wife? It must have been a temptation to you."

"A temptation! How can you think so, Harold?" answered Azalea, indignantly. "You know how little I care about having money and a grand house; and the idea of marrying a man I know nothing of for the sake of having them—how can you talk of that as a temptation?"

"What can you think of me, then, leaving you and my father, and all for the sake of a small chance of winning a big house?"

"That's quite different," replied Azalea. "It's not merely for the house and money that you have been working; it's to win back the home of your ancestors, to put your father and yourself in your rightful position once more. There's some romance about that; it is very different from my marrying a man only because he is rich, of whom I had never heard a year ago."

"At best, I am afraid, however, that I am stooping to conquer. I only hope it may not turn out to be all stooping and no conquering. Ah! there's the first peep of the plain below the downs, and there's Chiltern nestling in the woods. What fine old trees they are, to be sure! Coming to the edge of these downs is very like gazing into the Land of Promise. That richly wooded landscape looks temptingly inviting from these bare downs. I can't believe that I can ever do any thing that will actually make a large part of the land before us my own. I could more easily imagine owning any number of railway shares; they don't impress the imagination in the same way; but I can't believe I can earn an estate. The world is certainly right in calling land *real* property; all other seems only make-believe in comparison."

"I think you were born to be a grand country gentleman, Harold. If you had the money, couldn't Chiltern be yours at once?"

"Yes, at once. And for the next twelve years I should only need money. After that, even if I had the money, I should have to make my bargain with the Liffords, and they might refuse to sell."

The road, which had skirted the edge of the downs for half a mile, now turned toward the Salisbury Plain once more; and, after a drive of another two miles, Dillon came in view, lying in its little chalk hollow, the trees round the house hiding it from view, but the fine old Norman church-tower standing up against them, and here and there the blue smoke curling upward from the scattered cottages.

"It does look pretty, doesn't it, Harold?" said Azalea, as their home came in sight. "You had better stop the fly at the top of the path, and let me run down and prepare your father for your coming. You know he never likes to be startled; and your return this afternoon will be nearly as unexpected here as your arrival was at Ems."

"Quite true, dearest; you think for every one. Dear me, how jolly it is to be at home again, and how pretty and quiet it all looks! Holloa! stop here," he cried to the fly-man, as they reached the top of the path, leading by a short cut to the house. "You run down here, Azalea, and I will drive round. I will stop the fly at the gate, and walk up to the house."

Azalea jumped out, and was soon at the bottom of the path. As she came in sight of the small lawn in front of the library windows, she stopped a moment.

There was her uncle before her, walking up and down, talking eagerly to the vicar: the latter was apparently answering quietly and gently, and was, as usual, allowing his friend to monopolize all the talk.

Suddenly, however, Mr. Purvies stopped in his walk, and exclaimed, with more pleasure and animation in his face than had been seen there for years,

"Why, there's the child! My very dear girl, where have you dropped from?"

"From Heytesbury, to be sure, uncle," answered Azalea, cheerfully, taking hold of the vicar's arm and her uncle's hand at the same time. "And I am the bearer of such good news. Whom do you think I have seen?"

"Not Harold—not my boy—have you? Where is he, then?—is he coming down? Tell me at once all you can," said Mr. Chiltern, impatient and delighted at the same time.

"Yes, I have seen Harold: he is home, and you may expect him at once."

"What! to-day? Why didn't he write? My dear boy! it will make me feel ten years younger to see him once more. I could never believe he would really come home this summer. Why didn't you bring him down with you, Azalea, if he is in England?"

"And how did you get to England, my child?" asked Mr. Purvies, without giving Azalea time to answer. "We heard of you at Ems last."

"Harold brought me over, and we came down from town together this afternoon. He will be here directly—there, I hear his fly stopping at the gate."

And before many more words could be spoken, Harold himself advanced, with rapid and joyful steps, and seized his father's hand in a warm, affectionate gripe.

"Thank God, I find all as I left it!" he exclaimed, fervently. "Why, father, you don't look a week older, nor you either, uncle. The only change is in this young lady," he added, drawing Azalea to the front. "From a village maiden she seems to have grown into an empress."

"You have grown more of a man too, my boy," said Mr. Chiltern. "But changes in you are of little moment, so long as it's really your own self that we see back again. There's a sad lack of sunshine about this old place when you are not here to make it bright."

"My dear father," returned Harold, "I wish your life could always be as bright as I should like. At any rate, I have come home for the present, and mean to try to enliven it a little. Azalea and I will do our best."

Mr. Chiltern was far too much occupied with his son's presence to notice the manner in which he linked Azalea and himself together; but it did not pass unremarked by John Purvies.

"I knew the child would be gone from me for good if she once got to London; but it seems I should have equally lost her had she remained quietly here. I suppose it's best so; I could not have hoped for so much of her had she married any one else." It was thus he thought to himself, as he still held Azalea's hand, while the father and son exchanged their first greetings.

"But explain it all, Harold, my boy," at length said Mr. Chiltern. "Azalea suddenly dropped from the sky ten minutes ago, and, with hardly more warning, you followed her. I don't care for much beyond the fact that you are here; still, I should like to know how you met."

"It is very simply told," returned Harold. "Mrs. Macgregor was knocked up by the heat sooner than she expected, and was ordered a course of the waters at Ems. Her husband could not leave India at once, and I was deputed to take care of her so far. There, by a lucky accident, I chanced on Azalea; and as our Dillon party would be incomplete without her, I carried her off, in spite of all Madge could say to the contrary."

"Ah, to be sure: you wanted your old songs after dinner; you wanted every thing to be exactly as in old days," said Mr. Chiltern, beginning once more to speak in his old slighting way of Azalea.

"I wanted Azalea for herself, father, as no one who sees her can help doing. Half Ems was in despair at my luck in having a right to carry her off with me."

"Azalea had had a season of gay doings in London since you saw her last, and I don't deny it has improved her," he said, looking with something of an uncle's pride at his niece. "But I don't know that this London visit has been altogether the success Madge led me to expect."

He was disappointed at Azalea returning to him unmarried, and, so far as he knew, with no nearer prospect of being married than if she had spent the summer on the downs.

Mr. Chiltern, however, was far too refined a gentleman to do more than distantly allude to his hope. The smallest joke as to Azalea's lovers, or lack of them, would have been supremely distasteful to him. Any love-making, out of the classics, was tinged with vulgarity, in his eyes; and although ready to own the advantages of her being married, he dreaded having more to do with Azalea's settlement than writing a formal consent to her marriage with some unknown individual. He had hoped to have been called on to write such a letter this summer; and could he have felt sorry for any thing at this moment, he would have been disappointed at Azalea's returning as she had left.

The vicar took possession of Azalea, and, with her arm clinging to his, they walked up and down the lawn, allowing father and son to engross one another for the first hour of their meeting.

"Childie," he said, affectionately, "you look as if you had grown into a very fine lady in these four months away from us. I don't know what it is—your dress is simple enough."

"I don't feel a bit like a fine lady, Uncle John," answered Azalea; "and I don't think I ever shall make one. I soon got very tired of London balls and parties, and the streets and shops, and all that is supposed to make people fine ladies. But I could never get tired of all there is to interest me besides. I wish you could see the pictures and Westminster Abbey, and hear the choristers. I don't think there can be any thing better in the world."

"You shall tell me all you have seen and felt and thought about in these past months by degrees," said the vicar, smiling at the enthusiasm which changed the ordinary calm of her manner into animation.

"And was it not wonderful, my meeting Harold at Ems?" she went on. "Coming home with him seems to complete all our happiness."

"It makes all the difference, I am afraid, to you, my child. So it's to be the old story of cousin-lovers, is it?" he said, taking her hand, and smiling a more than half-melancholy smile.

"How did you guess? Who told you?" asked Azalea, blushing crimson. "I know I am not good enough for him; I know you will all think he is throwing himself away; but how can I help loving him and doing as he would have me?"

"I think nothing of the kind, dear, what-

ever his father may do. You know I love Harold dearly, but you are my own child, whom I am sorry to have to give up at all, and for whom I think no one good enough. Had you seen nothing of the world, I should have said you were deciding too hastily; but I suppose, after this summer, if you met no one in London for whom you could care more, I must make up my mind to let Harold have you."

"Oh, Uncle John, how could I like any one better than Harold? What could all those new people in London be to me, compared with him? But, do you know, I am afraid marrying me will lessen his chance of having Chiltern, the great wish of his life. I want him to wait till he owns the Chase before marrying; but he compares the two, and deliberately chooses me. Is it not good of him? How I can let him, I don't know. When I am away from him, I fancy I won't; but when I am with him, I am powerless to contradict him or cross him in any thing."

"You imagine that he's wrong to wish to have you for his own, even though he lessen his chance of having Chiltern some day?" asked the vicar, with an incredulous smile. "You are a very silly child if you do."

"Madge thought it almost wicked of me to marry Harold," answered Azalea. "She seemed to think it would be the undoing and ruin of us both. She was quite anxious Harold should find me married when he came home."

"Was she?" said the vicar, who had his own suspicions of Mrs. Elliot's scheme, and who knew that its fulfillment would have pleased Mr. Chiltern as much as herself.

"I am very thankful, then," he continued, after a pause, "that she was disappointed. Much as I should like to see the Chilterns in their old home, I would not have Harold pay the price Madge would wish to receive. But maybe, dear, your uncle will not take my view of this matter. If so, you must not be down-hearted, but remember that the course of true love never did run smooth."

"I am afraid he will be very angry. But what can I do? I must marry Harold if he wishes me to do so."

"I think we can trust Harold to fight his own battle; and, in any case, you have a friend in me."

Azalea's face had become rather grave as Mr. Chiltern's probable anger was suggested to her.

"Dear Uncle John," she said, "you are the kindest friend I could have. I would do any thing not to annoy my uncle—if Harold would not be grieved."

"I believe you would, really and truly. I know no selfish wish for your own happiness would ever lead you to displease him. But you had better leave the matter entirely in Harold's hands."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HAROLD did not touch on personal matters with his father on this first evening, and it passed off pleasantly to them all.

The dinner was the liveliest that had been eaten in the old dining-room for many a year. Harold delighted his father with graphic accounts of his doings in India; of his hurried journeys, the trading nature of which he did not enlarge on; of the occasional days of sport on a grand scale which he had enjoyed; of Calcutta society; and of the gaudy splendor of the native courts he had visited.

Azalea joined in the talk a great deal more than she would have done six months ago; and, unknowingly to himself, Mr. Chiltern appealed and listened to her more than he had been used to do.

He generally estimated people at the price at which they estimated themselves. A hidden violet, however great its charm, he would never have discovered; but he was ready to admire and enjoy the beauty of a rose that was brought under his very eye. He would never have been capable of drawing out and developing Azalea; but he was ready to be pleased with her conversation and admire her beauty, now that she had been brought out by others.

The lively dinner over, Harold asked Azalea to come out with him for half an hour's star-gazing. She raised no objection; for she was anxious to learn how and when Harold intended to disclose their engagement to his father.

The vicar's words had raised a scruple in her mind which before had never arisen. The misty, cloud-like love which had been growing in steadfastness during Harold's absence was now assuming the palpable and realistic shape of a marriage engagement. The idea of confiding the former to her uncle had never occurred to her; but now she hardly liked remaining an hour under his roof definitely engaged to his son, while the fact was unknown to him. Discussing the matter with Harold was not pleasant, and for the moment she could almost wish to return to the dreamy land of indefinite longing from which Madge in the first instance had awakened her.

"Come up on the downs for ten minutes, and watch the falling stars," said Harold, as they stepped into the garden from the dining-room window. "We lose them nearly all down here with this confined horizon. Come and sit on the stones by the hawthorn-bush."

And they mounted together the steep, narrow way which led directly to the downs, and were soon seated on the stones, or rather together on a large bowlder, such as is not uncommonly to be found in a chalk country.

"How mild and still it is up here!" said Harold, winding his arm round Azalea's waist. "My darling, you can only half understand my delight in being at home again—home, too, meaning so much more than it used to do in old days, even the certainty of your love. When do you think we can be married, dearest? I am longing to put the possibility of any further separations out of the question. I must talk to my father in the morning, and I should like to be able to tell him that we had fixed on the date for our marriage."

"Before he knows we are even engaged? We must settle nothing till he consents. I am afraid, Harold, he will be very angry. I am sure I am the last person he wishes you to marry."

"Why should you think so? The idea may be new to him, but what more can he wish for in my wife than your beauty, goodness, and intellect? A man must indeed be hard to please whom you do not satisfy."

"Did it never strike you, Harold," said Azalea, speaking slowly, "how easy it would be for you to have Chiltern, if you were to marry a wife with a large fortune?"

"Who put that idea into your head?" asked Harold, almost sternly. "I know it never came there of itself. Did Madge suggest my going heiress-hunting?"

"But would it not be an easy way of getting Chiltern?" persisted Azalea, evading the question. "Your father might think so, and therefore be vexed at your marrying a pauper like me."

"And did it ever strike you, or rather Madge," he continued, returning to the point—"for I know you are not responsible for the idea—that I am not quite such a low fellow as to want a property as the price for marrying a woman I don't care for? No, you silly child, never let that thought cross your mind again. If you can make or inherit a fortune, I don't say I will desert you in consequence. But you can hardly need to be told that no other woman's fortune offers the slightest temptation to me."

"Doesn't it, Harold? I thought I was right, and you would never marry for money," she said, clinging to his arm. "But what shall we do if your father is really angry, and refuses his consent to our marriage?"

"I hope it won't come to that. He can't really refuse it. Anyhow, we are so bound to one another now, it would be impossible we should give one another up. I couldn't do it; and you, Azalea, swear to me that nothing shall make you change; that no opposition whatsoever shall induce you to give me up; and that no talking to, as to what may be for our mutual good, shall have any effect on you. After these four years of risk and uncertainty, we must stand firm now, mustn't we, darling?"

"I will never do otherwise than you tell me, Harold," answered Azalea. "Only I should like your father to know at once that we love one another. You will tell him in the morning, won't you?"

"I will tell him the moment you will let me add that our wedding-day is fixed. Do you think to-day three weeks would do? We must be in the parish three Sundays, you know; otherwise I don't see why we need wait even so long."

"No, I don't think quite so soon as that," said Azalea, smiling. "You shall settle it all in reason; but any time short of three months is out of reason."

"Three months! Why, I have only four months' holiday before I must be settled in London and go to the City every day."

"Well, we will say in four months we will be married; and till then you shall devote all your time to your father. You really ought to give up every hour to him now, if you are to be off again in four months. Just think, you have been away from him four whole years!"

"And I have been away from *you* for four years too, my sweet one. I know my father ought to claim me for part of my holiday, but not quite for all. We must have at least a month for our run to Lugano, and to be all in all to one another, before I have to leave you for the better part of each day. One single honey-moon is not too much to ask for."

"You shall settle it so if you like; only consult your father as much as possible. I do think he has some cause to complain. You choose a profession which is very distasteful to him, in the hopes of enabling him to end his days at Chiltern. And now, midway in your work, you are going to hamper yourself with a wife who will be a great hinderance to you, and of whom he will not approve. Seen from his point of view, do you not think he has some reason to complain?"

"You must not put it in that way. What can I do better than give him the sweetest daughter in Christendom? Don't you suppose his old age will be a much happier one with you to care for and tend him—you who are like his own child, and will be doubly so when we are one?"

"No, Harold, dear, I don't. I have never been like his own child. I don't know why, but I have never been any thing to my uncle; I am sure he never missed me this summer. He lets me stop here because he is kind, and I am not much in his way; but my little finger is of more value to Uncle John than my whole self is to your father. It has always been so."

"Perhaps he looks on you as a child still. But, at any rate, you will be a greater comfort to him than a stranger could be."

"I doubt it," said Azalea.

She in no way resented the coldness with which she knew her uncle regarded her; but it was a fact which Harold ought to take into consideration, so as not to count on his father's affection for herself as a reason for his welcoming their marriage.

"Supposing we do meet with the greatest opposition," said Harold, "we must only stand all the firmer. I know you will be true to me, and let no one talk you out of your love for me, or your resolve to marry me."

"I will never do otherwise than you tell me," repeated Azalea. "I was half inclined to waver when Madge talked to me this summer, but only for a few minutes; and since then I have quite determined never to fancy I know what is for your good better than you know yourself. You will tell me, if you should think it wiser for us not to marry; till then I will let no one else make me think so. What should I have felt at Ems, when you suddenly appeared, had I broken my word to you?"

"I know I can trust you. I know you will stand any annoyance sooner than break faith with me. Was ever man so blest? You are the sweetest piece of perfection, body and soul, that an unworthy being was ever allowed to love."

"After that, I think we must go in. You can't possibly say more," answered Azalea, gayly. "Let's go, and you play chess with your father while I sing." . .

"Give me one kiss first," he said as they rose, and he caught her in his arms. "My own darling, you can hardly guess what you are to me."

"You are simply all the world to me," she answered. "Let us go in and enjoy one more evening in peace as a family party; to-morrow may be stormy."

"Come, my boy," said Mr. Chiltern, as they entered again from the window. "What are you two doing star-gazing so long? I have not had the chess-board out since you went away, and I want to see if the Hindoos have taught you how to beat your old father. Let's have a song, Azalea, there's a good girl!" he added, laying his hand on her shoulder and speaking more affectionately than was usual with him. "I hope all your opera-going has not spoiled you for a simple song."

"No, I'm sure it hasn't. I hope it has made me sing my simple songs all the better."

And so it had. Azalea's true, fine voice was as sweet and pure as ever; and her singing had gained the artistic finish which it is all but impossible to hope for without good teaching. She sung song after song; and, as she finished, the vicar remarked:

"The fine lady has somehow got into your voice and singing, too. But I don't think it has spoiled it more than the fine clothes spoil your own self."

"My clothes are really hardly different, Uncle John," laughed Azalea. "Only perhaps I have learned to put them on a little better."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The following morning, breakfast being over, Harold accosted his father with a request for half an hour's talk.

"Come along into the library, and I sha'n't let you off with half an hour. All our talk was but fun last evening; this morning I must seriously learn all about your future schemes. You seem to have set the ball rolling. I don't know what I should not have thought of myself at eight-and-twenty if I had made five thousand pounds. Why, it's a little fortune!"

The talk was likely to be even more serious than Mr. Chiltern anticipated.

"Father, how old were you when you married?" asked Harold, rather abruptly, as they seated themselves in the window of the old library.

The sun was shining brightly, and the wasps and bees kept sailing in and out from the flowers which grew in the border under the windows—not costly bedded-out plants, but old-fashioned perennials and mignonette, and other inexpensive annuals which Azalea had sown.

Mr. Chiltern's countenance fell as he heard his son's question.

"When did I marry?" he answered. "Why, before I was your age, my boy. What then? Have we something besides your business to discuss this morning? You are not thinking of adding to your cares in life, are you?"

"Yes, father, I am; and to my joys too. You would not wish me to be an old bachelor, would you, and to allow the Chilterns to die out of the world?"

"No, no; I suppose we must not allow that to happen. There are too few of the old families of England left not to make it a duty to keep them up when possible. I wonder if you have ever guessed what I wished in this matter. I too have had hopes of seeing you back at Chiltern, though not by the means you thought of. At one time I was disappointed, and had given up the hope of your getting the Chase by a marriage. But since Madge became a widow, I have allowed myself to dwell on the old hopes once more; and when I heard you were coming home this autumn, I began to think that every thing was working round as I wished."

"Oh, stop, father!" exclaimed Harold, with distress in his voice. "Don't tell me you wished me to marry Madge, a widow

who eloped with her first husband, and then left him."

"Of course, if you like, you can put it ill-naturedly, and let a wild, girlish freak injure a warm-hearted woman for life," said Mr. Chiltern, speaking testily.

"I don't wish to be ill-natured," answered Harold, "but, my dear father, under no circumstances could I ever have asked Madge to be my wife. She left these parts before I was old enough to think about falling in love; and Azalea came to us just when I was old enough to begin to dream of it. Father, how could I think of Madge, or any other woman, when under our very roof I found the loveliest and best that ever lived? You know what Azalea is. Where could I find any one I could wish to marry after knowing her?"

Mr. Chiltern had grown rather pale as his son spoke, and his teeth were now firmly clenched together. He was silent for a few minutes, and then, speaking stiffly, and with an obvious effort to keep calm, said,

"And you have come to ask my consent to your marrying your cousin?"

"Yes, father, I have."

Mr. Chiltern turned away, and there was another pause. Then he said, petulantly,

"What a fool I was to allow that girl to be brought up here! It was all Purvies's fault; and now the very worst I imagined has happened. Oh, Harold, my boy," he went on, plaintively, "you never make me very happy one day without undoing it all the next. Do you remember when you came from Oxford with high honors, how proud I was? And then you disappointed all my hopes by going off to India. And now, when you have come home safely, and I was hoping you would marry Madge, you tell me that you intend to marry Azalea. Of course, if you mean to do so, you will do it. I know now which of us has the strongest will. But it is hard—every wish I have ever had for you is doomed to disappointment. You could make no marriage I dislike more; but I don't flatter myself I shall be able to prevent it," he added, bitterly.

"My dear father," said Harold, affectionately, but still not inclined to yield an inch, "don't complicate matters by any allusions to Madge. I don't suppose for a moment she would have me; but do you suppose I have so little regard for my own honor as to marry a woman to whom I am perfectly indifferent, if by doing so I can get back to Chiltern? No; the price is too high even for the Chase."

"But why should you be indifferent to her? You were always such good friends."

"Please don't talk of it. Whatever might have been, I can never now think of any other woman than Azalea. But you can cause us all very much sorrow by your opposition."

"And you wish me to give my consent off-hand. No, Harold, I can't do that—I must think the matter over. But we won't discuss it further. Differences between you and me are not pleasant—you had better leave me now."

"Won't you shake hands, father? It is a real pain to me to oppose you."

"Of course I will shake hands with you. You shall never be able to say you have asked me that in vain. I can't afford to quarrel with you; there are too few in the world for me to love. Every wish, every ambition I have, centres round you; and you are the very one to cross me at every turn."

"My dear father, don't allow me to do that. Why should this cross you? You can not but own that Azalea is more than worthy of me, even judging me as kindly as you do," Harold answered, holding his father's hands warmly. "Is she not good and beautiful, and is she not clever and cultivated, and every thing a man can desire in his wife? From seeing her grow up from a child, you rather undervalue her, I think."

"Lovers' rhapsodies," said Mr. Chiltern, gloomily. "She is the very last wife I should have chosen for you. Leave me now for a little, my boy. I must think more about this matter, and talk to your uncle. But remember, I have not given my consent; only I love you too well to quarrel with you."

Harold slowly left the room, took up his hat, and sauntered into the village. Azalea had gone to the school; so there was no chance of being able to spend the morning with her.

His father's opposition was much of the nature he had expected, after the idea that he was likely to meet with any had been put before him. It was not violent, but peevish and wailing, and was more likely to vent itself on Azalea than on him. That it should not do so must be his first care; and he went into the village in the hope of meeting the vicar, and talking over the matter with him.

He was not long in finding Mr. Purvies, who was leaving the school-room, where he had been enjoying the sight of the children's pleasure in welcoming Azalea once more among them.

"Harold, you ought to have been with me, to see how all the little faces brightened when Azalea came back to her old place," he said as they met.

"I am glad to hear the little beggars are so discriminating. Uncle, I want to talk with you. May I come into the vicarage?"

"To be sure you may. I was going up to see your father, but that can wait half an hour."

"I am glad I met you first," returned

Harold; and they entered together the small study, in which there was literally nothing but a table-desk, two chairs, and a fair number of standard books, classical and theological.

"Sit down, Harold," said the vicar, clearing away some dingy-looking old folios from the one spare chair.

"Uncle John," began Harold, "I have just had it out with my father. I mean, I have told him that I intend to marry Azalea."

"Well, what then?" asked Mr. Purvies.

"Why, he's not very pleased about it. I don't know what he wants. My father was never a mercenary man; and, in every respect but money, where could I find any one to equal Azalea?"

"Nowhere, I should say," answered the vicar. "But from the first your father dreaded this happening. Why, I can't be sure; though I may guess at one thing that has influenced him. For himself, he never was mercenary, as you say; but for you he may have had views which savored of being so. In all but fortune, however, Azalea has not her peer in England."

"No, that she hasn't," returned Harold, eagerly. "You appreciate her, at any rate, uncle. But I don't think my father does. He seems to have some vague dislike to our marriage, which he can't define, and which is therefore all the more difficult to combat and dispel. I fear he will never give a hearty consent, but in the end he won't oppose our marrying, and quarrel with me. He will never be really angry with me; but somehow I dread that Azalea may be exposed to the displeasure he won't let me feel. Will you help me to prevent that happening?"

"That would be too unjust. I don't think he will do that; but I will go up to the house at once and talk to him."

"I am afraid I have seriously annoyed him; he was not exactly angry, only very grieved, which is a great deal worse. And then I fear that the anger, which he loves me too well to show, may fall on my poor Azalea's head."

"We must both guard her from that. You know, Harold, I have loved you almost as if you were my own boy; but yet, I am not sure I think you good enough for Azalea."

"Don't fancy that I think myself so," answered Harold, modestly. "But my father has been shut out of all society, and seen so few women of late years, that I don't think he quite realizes what Azalea is. If he could have seen her the centre of admiration in London, as Madge described, he would better understand the value of my prize."

"I will go and talk to him at once, before the poor child has a chance of meeting him."

Without further words, the vicar walked up to the house, and went straight to the library.

There he found Mr. Chiltern just as Harold had left him, sitting in the window, with his arms resting on the writing-table before him. Even the vicar, though not disposed to sympathize very keenly with this form of vexation, was touched by the depression and distress which he saw in his old friend's face. It had been so joyous and beaming the evening before, and now was so overcast.

"Purvies," he said, as soon as the vicar entered, "you were a wise man never to cumber yourself with wife or child."

The latter, even at this late date, winced at the reference to his lost love.

"Yes," continued Mr. Chiltern, "you were a very wise man. The best of sons seem only born to thwart their fathers; and the longer they are before they begin, the more completely they do it. Harold never caused me a moment's pain till he left college, and since then he has caused me little else. Perhaps it's a pity he did not begin a little earlier; then I should never have expected any thing better from him."

"Come, Philip, don't be bitter," returned his old friend; "let's talk this matter over. I feel half responsible for it, as, without my advice, I don't think Azalea would be here at all."

"No, she would not; and, vexed as I am with Harold, I am far more with that girl for coming here and disturbing my poor boy's peace of mind. Of course, I can't oppose him and make him wretched, nor can I allow Azalea to do so; but I most thoroughly wish she had never left Italy."

"Does it not strike you, then, that, in winning Azalea, Harold is a very lucky fellow? that there are many whom the world would consider in rank far above our boy who would be proud of her as their wife? that Azalea, from a worldly point of view, has given up a great deal to be true to Harold? I don't say that in her case the sacrifice is a great one; but that is because, to her high-toned mind, worldly greatness is as nothing compared with affection, which is only another reason for our thinking Harold lucky. From seeing her so constantly, and having no opportunities of comparing her with other women, you fail altogether to appreciate your niece, Chiltern. Why," continued the vicar, "what is it that men look for in their wives? Is it beauty? Then Harold, under other circumstances, could hardly have hoped to win the beauty of a London season. Is it goodness and intelligence? Azalea's worst enemy could hardly find serious fault with her in either. In birth she is Harold's equal; and as for money— I won't believe that you have so far entered into the spirit of the

age as to wish your son to think of money in choosing his wife."

It was seldom that the vicar made so long a speech, and Mr. Chiltern listened patiently to the end.

"Then I suppose," he answered, "if all you say be true, I ought to consider Harold brought me good news this morning?"

"Well, why not? Why make up your mind that it must be a misfortune, when there are no grounds to do so?"

"But there are grounds. You are not a father, Purvies, and can't judge. I don't at all see Azalea with your eyes; I don't consider her the most beautiful, and the cleverest, and best woman in the world; and I had quite other views for my boy," returned Mr. Chiltern, speaking warmly. "Some may think Azalea all you say, but I shall never cease to regret having had her over here."

Mr. Chiltern could not bring himself actually to disclose to the vicar the hopes he had entertained of a marriage between Madge and Harold. Indeed, only lately had he dwelt on them, and distinctly told himself that he wished his son to marry the heiress. It was only when he saw his hopes once more likely to be frustrated that he knew how strong the wish had been.

"But, surely," said Purvies, "if Harold thinks with me of Azalea's merits, that is the principal thing. If she will make the boy happy, what more can you wish?"

"Wish? Why, that he had never had a chance of fancying such a marriage—that I had let Azalea live and die at Lugano. But it's no use talking. I can't forbid the marriage entirely; my only hope is to postpone it, and here, John, you must help me."

"With what object? Certainly not in the hope of ultimately separating Azalea and Harold. The children have stood a four years' separation, and I don't think it's fair to ask either of them to wait much longer. Happiness is now within their reach, and I won't help to put it from them. You don't know all the sorrow that single word 'postponement' has had to answer for," added the vicar, feelingly.

"Then you would have them marry to-morrow morning, I suppose?" asked Mr. Chiltern, angrily.

"Seriously, I would have them marry as soon as possible. Why should they wait? Harold can afford to keep a wife."

"Of course, he's independent of me. I need not be reminded of that. But I will give no consent to an immediate marriage. I shall insist on their waiting a year, and perhaps by then Azalea may realize the injury she is doing my boy."

"You give your consent, then, only in the hope that it may never be taken advantage of. You hope either to mar your son's happiness for life, or to see him a simple rascal, who can break his word to a woman. I suppose we both hope that there you may fail. Don't fancy you will ever make Azalea faithless. She never changes when she has once made up her mind; she never did from a child. She will never release Harold till he himself asks her. Madge, for some reason or other, tried to influence her as you wish before Harold's return, and failed; and her feeling for and faith in Harold were not then as strong as they are now."

Mr. Chiltern did not answer.

Nothing that could be advanced was likely to make him change his mind; for a man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still. But he began to think himself very ill-used. All the world was going against him; for the vicar and Harold, with Azalea, constituted his world, the Miss Foleys being on its outskirts. These latter also would side against him; old maids were always romantic. There was therefore no one to sympathize with him in his ill-treatment.

He would not stop to question himself whether he was really in the wrong; he was too much afraid of finding that he was; and what discovery can be more disagreeable? It does not help to make a man cheerful when his reason runs in the opposite direction to his wishes.

Mr. Chiltern was forced to admit that, abstractly, Harold ought to marry; but this of itself was not altogether pleasant to him. His son was so much to him, that, under any circumstances, he would have been inclined to be jealous of his wife. Madge he could have suffered. She had formed part of their small circle for many years—an important part, not an insignificant one, like poor Azalea. She understood Mr. Chiltern perfectly, and knew how to flatter and how to amuse him; whereas Azalea was too proud to do the former, and never supposed it was possible she could do the latter.

Had Harold married Madge, Mr. Chiltern would have gained a daughter and a higher position in the world at the same time. He could have forgiven Madge for taking the first place in his boy's affections, and have ceded it to her without repining; but with Azalea it was very different. He had always looked on her as a mere child, whose chief merit lay in her not being so much in the way as he had feared; and how could he bear to see her in the position he thought no one really worthy to fill; to see himself thrust into a second place in his son's heart—the only heart he seriously valued—and even to see Harold brave his anger rather than lose Azalea? It was trying.

Then, too, his old friend—his friend of years past and gone, before Harold had brightened, or Azalea darkened, his hearth—the vicar, too, took his contrary part, and

seemed determined to make him appear as the destroyer of his son's happiness. He felt very bitter and sore with the whole world as Purvies finished speaking.

"Argue as you like," he said, angrily, "I shall not give an unconditional consent to a marriage I disapprove of. Few fathers would give their consent, under any conditions, in such a case. I shall tell Harold, if he will wait a year, or till he returns to India, I will not oppose his wishes; but nothing you can urge will induce me to consent to an immediate marriage. I won't discuss the matter any further. Ask them to bring my luncheon in here, if you please. I prefer to be alone just now."

"I will see to that. Perhaps you would like me to tell Harold your decision?" asked Purvies, knowing from experience how willing his friend was to be saved the necessity of making any unpleasant communication.

"Thank you, John, perhaps that will be best. It's a bad thing for a father to be forced to cross his son, and it is better that what Harold may look on as bad news should come from you. Only leave no loophole for another discussion. I am quite determined; and any further annoyance in the matter will only make me more so."

Purvies could not help thinking that, as it was a father, and a father alone, who was trying his son, it mattered but little who carried the bad news. He did not, however, speak his thoughts aloud, and was soon once more in the village, in search of the combined authors of all this morning's talk.

He found that Harold, after wandering about the village, but never for many minutes keeping out of sight of the school, had been at length rewarded by catching Azalea as she came forth from a morning's work with her little scholars.

The cousins were making their way up to their favorite downs, when the vicar joined them.

"Come, children, into my garden," he said, "and hear what news I bring."

This was soon told. To Azalea it seemed as if her uncle had conceded every thing; to Harold, as if the fight were only now going to begin.

"Wait a whole year! That's impossible!" he exclaimed. "I will do any thing in reason to please my father, but this is altogether preposterous."

"Gently, Harold," said Azalea, laying her hand on his arm; "don't get angry before you understand how very little it is your father asks. I knew he could not like your marrying me; and if he really allows it a year hence, I think we ought to be very grateful to him."

Harold's only answer was a gesture of impatience.

"Think, dear Harold," she continued, "we did not ourselves wish to be married for three months, and all your father asks is that we should wait nine months more."

"Yes; but nine very different months. If I agreed to wait three months, it was only because I could spend them at home, and the delay involved no separation. But a year is different. I shall have to leave you, and begin my life in London alone. It will be as bad as India. No, Azalea," he went on, getting rather excited, "I sha'n't consent to any thing of the kind; we are neither of us children, and my father ought not to ask any such sacrifice of us. Won't you stand our friend, Uncle John, and induce my father to agree to our marrying in November?"

"I would have it so; but I don't think any thing more that I can say will have any effect on him. He thinks he has yielded a great deal, and I am sure he will yield no more."

"Nor ought he to be asked," said Azalea. "Harold, don't be so hard on your father. Think how much it must cost him to allow you to marry at all against his wishes. You are almost the only person he loves in the world; and, when you might marry any one, to see you choose me must vex him. And he foregoes his own wishes, and only asks a very little concession in return; and you sha'n't refuse it him. I won't help you. Don't tease him about it any more; for should you even wring an unwilling consent from him, it will be useless, for, now I know his wishes, I won't marry you for a year."

"Azalea, Azalea, don't talk so! You promised me last evening not to ask me to wait beyond three months, and I shall not let you off. Don't disappoint me, darling. Why should my father be so cruel as to try me in this way? Of what use can a year's delay be, if we marry at the end of it? And if we don't—if in consequence of this delay I lose you—shall I ever be able to forgive my father for destroying my happiness?"

"Be patient, dear," answered Azalea. "We can't always have every thing we want on the moment; and if you think this delay is unnecessary, you will have all the more merit in bearing it patiently. There is very little merit if we only make sacrifices of the utility of which we are convinced."

"Your teaching, Uncle John," said Harold, half smiling. "I wish it had not been so thorough, or sown in such fertile soil."

"You will not really suffer," continued Azalea. "We are neither of us very old. A year hence you will only be nine-and-twenty, and all your plans will be more settled by that time; you will know whether we need have a house in England, or are to go back to India, and a good deal besides. You trusted me when you went away for a much longer time, and I did what you wished; why should you anticipate any harm from this slight delay?"

"But, if no harm comes of it, where is the good?" persisted Harold.

"The good is, that it pleases your father; and it will do us no harm to give up our will to his."

"Azalea, how plausible you are! and yet you are wrong all the time. Isn't she, Uncle John?"

"It will be better for you, Harold, if you think her right," answered the vicar, who had listened to the cousins in silence. "I understand your father pretty well, and I don't think he means to yield further. You would not wish actually to quarrel with him."

"Dear me, what a nuisance things are!" said Harold. "My only dread in coming home was that I might find Azalea changed. I did not anticipate this."

"Then a much smaller evil has befallen you than you feared, my boy. So be thankful that things are no worse."

"Well, then, I am to resign myself to this abominable year's delay, am I?"

"Don't use bad language, Harold," said Azalea; "and you must resign yourself, for it takes two to make a marriage, and I am not going to help you to disobey your father."

"I only hope, then, you may enjoy your winter all alone here as much as I shall mine in London."

"I shall spend it in learning how to keep house for you. You know, if I married you now, I should hardly be able to order your dinner. Mrs. Price never will let me into the kitchen; she never would. I suppose she fears I should usurp her place and want to be housekeeper, if she yielded the first inch of ground. But when she understands that it is you who will suffer by my ignorance, I think she will thaw sufficiently to condescend to instruct me. She would abdicate in the kitchen altogether, Harold, if she thought it would serve you. I really believe she is the greatest admirer you have."

"Old Price and I were always friends. She always told me she would stand any thing from me except my bringing home a young mistress to rule it over her. So her mind will be relieved when she finds that, instead of that, I am taking away the only young mistress she ever had."

"You put it all nicely to her, then, and get her to promise to teach me how to make your money go very far, and all about housekeeping; and then by next year I shall know all I need, and shall not be a specimen of the bookish wives who neglect their home duties."

Harold having thus been talked into an unwilling decision to trouble his father no further, the subject was not again mentioned between them, and life at Dillon sped smoothly along.

That Harold and Azalea should be always together was nothing new. For the first few days Mr. Chiltern was unusually icy in his manner toward his niece; but as it had never been warm, and as Azalea was the last person to think her claims to consideration were slighted, she hardly noticed any change in her uncle. She in no way crossed or opposed him in his daily life; and after a while his easy-going nature making it difficult to him to keep up any formal displeasure, he lapsed into his former way of ignoring his niece altogether. This was more difficult than it had been, but he tried to be as indifferent as in past days.

CHAPTER XXIX.

But Harold's lucky star was still in the ascendant, as was usual, when he and his father differed, and the latter was destined to be even more completely vanquished than he had yet been.

Before the four months which Harold was to spend at Dillon were over, a sudden change befell their preconcerted plans.

Azalea was not in the habit of receiving many letters. One morning, however, among the few which the postman brought was one in an unknown hand addressed to her.

"Why, Azalea, have you a Swiss among your correspondents?" asked Harold as he handed the letter to his cousin. "There's a letter for you with a Swiss stamp on it."

"I did not know I had; let us see who it is."

It proved to be in English, and came from the landlord of the hotel at Lugano, and Azalea began to read the four closely written pages. Before she had proceeded far, it was evident the letter interested her deeply.

The man's purpose in writing was to tell her that, on the previous evening, the old lady who kept house for, and was sole attendant on Azalea's very aged grandfather at Sorrengo, had found her way to the hotel in great distress. Her master had that day taken to his bed, and though apparently not seriously ill, seemed to think there was no prospect of his ever again leaving it. His mind was still quite clear, and all that troubled him was that his grandchild was so far away from him.

"I have left you this house in my will," he had said to his donna. "What little more I have must go to my grandchild. My mind can not rest till I see the child, and know that it will be really my Annetta's daughter who inherits. Those English are ready to sell their souls for money; how can I tell what they may not do? If Azalea were dead, they might keep it from me, and the family might steal my poor little earnings. You go down to the hotel; the landlord is a friend of mine and can write English, and beg him to write and tell my

grandchild to come to me without fail. If she does not come, I must dispose of my little fortune differently."

Such was the purport of the letter. The landlord reiterated the meaning of the old woman's story with every emphatic word in his vocabulary, and finished by saying:

"Mademoiselle will pardon my advising her to act without delay on the receipt of the information I have the honor to send her, as Taddeo Rosario is reported to be far more wealthy than he is willing to allow."

As Azalea finished reading her letter, she looked up bewildered.

"Well, Azalea, what's your news?" asked her uncle, who was not without some little curiosity when any thing unusual was in the wind.

"My grandfather—" she began, and then stopped.

"What! is your grandfather dead?" asked Mr. Chiltern.

"No, he's not dead; he wants me. Harold, read it to your father. I must go, I suppose."

Harold did as he was told; and as he read, Azalea listened and more fully understood what she had hardly mastered at the first perusal.

As he finished, Mr. Chiltern said:

"Yes, my dear, you must go, certainly, and at once. Your grandfather must not be allowed to die alone and without seeing you."

Harold was thankful to his father for the way in which he expressed himself. He had never expected any fortune with Azalea; but after feeling the want of money as keenly as he had done all his life, he would be glad for any small addition to his income which would enable him to make Azalea's life easier. He in no way anticipated that she was likely to inherit any sum that would make the fulfilling of his great hope more possible; but he felt that a few hundreds would be very useful in starting their married life. He guessed that the same feeling of satisfaction was also in his father's mind; but he was glad he had not put it forward before Azalea; that she was innocent of any such thought, he felt sure.

"Thank you, uncle. I will go at once. But—can I go alone? I wonder if Uncle John would take me?"

"Of course, he can't," broke in Harold, who perceived at once his opportunity, and was determined to make the most of it. "How can he?" he added. "Who's to do his work while he's away. There's no one hereabout with an extra curate who could come over even for Sunday duty. I will take you; there's no one else who can. You run away, Azalea, and begin your packing at once, while I settle all that's needed with my father."

As soon as Azalea had left the room, Harold turned to Mr. Chiltern, and said, earnestly,

"Oh, father, don't stand in our way now! You know, as matters are, we ought not to start off alone for Lugano. I am not prudish; but still, Lugano is so much farther off than Ems; and as we are openly engaged, we can't travel there alone and unmarried. Why now insist on a year's delay? I can't see Azalea go off without me, and for so uncertain a time too. Father, if you ever loved me, give your consent to our being married at once. You must know that nothing will part us a year hence. Why, then, try us so cruelly now?"

Mr. Chiltern was silent. He had never before felt so charitably toward Azalea as in these last few minutes, in which the unexpected prospect of her being her grandfather's heiress had been presented to him. His imagination was quick and sanguine, and in these few minutes all the stories he had ever heard of misers' wealth and Jewish hoards had come vividly before him. What, after all, if Azalea should turn out to be an heiress?

"Run down to the vicarage, and ask your uncle to come up here," he said at last.

Harold was off in an instant, joy beaming in his face. He argued that his father could only wish to see the vicar in order to find further reasons for granting what he asked.

Azalea had, as directed, left the breakfast-room before Harold had made his petition, and did not know that there was any chance of her having to prepare for a wedding as well as for a journey. She had turned her attention at once to packing up, and was busy sorting her clothes with a vague thought that they would soon have to exchange places from drawer to box.

Meanwhile, the three men below were discussing Harold's wishes, or rather, two of them were giving Mr. Chiltern unanswerable reasons for consenting to them. He did not offer any opposition beyond a few easily answered objections, and at last said:

"In this, then, as in every thing else, Harold, you shall have your way."

"My very dear father, you will never regret your goodness."

"I don't think you will," echoed the vicar.

"I must find Azalea, and get her consent to our being married to-morrow morning," said Harold, hastily leaving the room.

"Come to the school-room, Azalea," said Harold, as soon as he had unearthed his cousin from her room. "I have got the most important affair of our life to discuss with you."

The school-room was a large and nearly empty room over the library. Why it was called the school-room I can't say, for no

one within the memory of man had ever studied there. In warm weather Azalea often frequented it; but it is needless to say that in winter no fire was ever lighted there for her convenience. There was a large old-fashioned sofa placed along one wall, to which Harold led Azalea, and then, seating himself beside her, said,

"Now, dear, I am going to try you, and see whether you will really do as I ask you in all things. Do you remember promising me to do so?"

"What—then you don't wish me to go to Lugano?" asked Azalea.

"No, it's not that I am going to ask of you. You must go, and I want to take you there."

"Will your father allow it?" exclaimed Azalea. "That will be too delightful."

"He not only allows that, but much more. I can not take you till we are married, and he puts no obstacle in the way of an immediate marriage. We must start at once, and be married even sooner."

Azalea stared vaguely at Harold.

"Married at once," she said at length, dreamily—"and your father consents?"

"Yes, dear. Now all the world agrees, you won't be the one to make any objection. You won't be a second Lydia Languish, who requires opposition to keep her love alive?" he said, smiling at her. "As soon as I can get a license, we can be married, and make our start for Switzerland at once. By to-day week we can easily be there. I am very sorry for the cause, but was ever any *dénouement* more delightful? To get my father's consent to carrying you off to the Italian lakes to-morrow morning—oh, 'Zalea, was ever any thing so jolly!"

"Married to-morrow morning!" said Azalea, opening wide her large brown eyes. "Harold, you are too quick for me. I can't take in such sudden changes at all; explain it, dear, a little."

"Have I been hasty?" answered Harold, soothingly, as he stroked her cheek. "I will tell you all about it gently."

And Azalea laid her head on her lover's shoulder, as he amplified his somewhat curt announcement.

"You see, dearest, I suppose it was the same with my father when I first told him of our engagement as it is with you now. It was even more startling than my sudden news this morning, and I dare say half his opposition came from his being so unprepared for what he heard; but, with time to think the matter over, I am sure he has become more reconciled to it. And now comes this letter: and he sees, as we all do, that you must go to your grandfather, that there's no one but myself who can take you, and that yet we ought not to go alone and unmarried; and so his last objections fall to the ground, and he agrees to our marrying at once. There is, therefore, nothing for us to do but to fix—I won't say the day, for it must be to-morrow—but the hour. Come, now," he went on, coaxingly, "I shall call you Lydia Languish for ever and ever if you make any difficulties. You know you belong to me already, and it's only the ceremony that has to be gone through. May I ride over to Devizes at once, and get a license, and tell Uncle John to be ready by eight o'clock to-morrow morning? And then, if we look sharp, we can catch the steamer at Dover in the middle of the day."

"It's all so sudden, Harold," remonstrated Azalea.

"Suddenness is no drawback to delightful things, darling. It's only sorrow that is so hard to bear when it comes upon us unawares. Are you not happy at the prospect of no further separations? I can easily make interest with the Macgregors for leave beyond my original four months, so I need not fear having to leave you at Lugano to watch over your grandfather alone. May I go off now? The morning is getting on, and I want to get the license. Say 'Yes,' my sweet one."

"The license for to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, the license which will enable you to fulfill your most precious promise. Say 'Yes' in my ear in your dearest voice."

"Yes, dear Harold," said Azalea, simply.

"My own darling, my own wife! While I am away, get Fanny to put your things ready for starting to-morrow morning, for we must have a last lover's walk on the downs this evening."

It was well for Azalea that her morning should be fully taken up with preparations for this sudden change and journey. Her wardrobe was now much fuller than it would have been had Madge never had the charge of it.

"Fanny, what ought I to be married in?" she asked of the girl who was helping her to pack, intensely excited at the prospect of this hasty wedding, the news of which had been already spread far and wide by the delighted Harold.

"Oh, miss, this lovely white. To be sure, it is but muslin, but it's beautifully trimmed, and no one could know it from new; and I heard Mrs. Price sending off to Mr. Anderson, the gardener at the Chase, to tell him to send up as many bits of orange-flower as he could find in the orange-house by six o'clock to-morrow morning. Mrs. Price said Mr. Harold must have a lovely bride; and, to be sure, miss, you will look beautiful, though there may be a cast of red in your hair," added Fanny, whose own glossy raven locks she was sure must be a source of envy to her young mistress, whose hair had only just escaped being absolutely red.

"I think Mr. Harold would like me in

white," said Azalea. "But will there be time for me to change?"

"To be sure there will, miss. Mrs. Price and me we'll both help. This gray dress I will leave out—but, oh, miss, I do wish you had a new traveling-hat! this one is quite yellow with the sun. Couldn't we trim it up, so as to hide the straw a little more, this afternoon?"

"I fear I sha'n't have any time for trimming hats, Fanny. I suppose I must take all my clothes—I don't know how long I shall be away—at least, all my morning dresses."

"To be sure, miss, I will pack them all, and only wish there were more. Don't you trouble, miss, about sorting your things—I will put them all in. If you would just arrange this bit of gauze round your hat, as you know how to, miss; and here's a damask rose you could fix in, and make the hat look quite new-like. Do, please, miss; it won't take ten minutes."

Azalea, as usual, did as she was told, and sat down on the edge of the bed, with a couple of yards of white gauze and a red rose, to manufacture a new hat out of an old one. Fanny was so anxious about it, and Azalea was too preoccupied to have any energy to oppose her.

While her fingers were busy with her needle, Azalea's thoughts traveled far back to her early childish days.

It was just ten years since she had said "Good-bye" to the sunny home she was about to revisit, and which was the first one she could remember. It was still as vividly before her mental eye as on the day she had first arrived in England. She could conjure up at will the vine-covered path which led to the house from the little green plateau that had been cleared from the chestnut-woods, and at the corner of which the church stood—the church to which the villagers used to throng in numbers, but which she never entered, and which, in consequence, had all the more mysterious interest for her.

Then, a few yards farther, but facing in another direction, she remembered the little shrine to which she would wander on the mild summer evenings, and watch the gradually melting snow on the top of the St. Gothard pass, tinged with rose-color from the setting sun. The view from that little shrine was the one most thoroughly burned into her memory—the chestnut-woods immediately below her, the flowery meadows in the valley, intersected with trailing vines, and tall, strong-growing maize; the miniature lake imbosomed in woody hills, above which rose the main spur of the Alps, becoming grander and grander till they reached the St. Gothard peak.

In winter, and even till midsummer, the pass would be white with snow, which reflected back every changeful atmospheric effect of color—black and gloomy-looking as the sky itself, when the huge thunder-clouds preceding a storm were rolling up; pale and cold as death, when the bright moon lighted up with unnatural distinctness every peak of the irregular pile; and then rosy and smiling as childhood in its happiest guise, when the sun was bidding it a lingering farewell, turning the snowy white first to a brilliant pink, and then by degrees to pale gold before finally dying away.

How many a time, as a child, had she not watched it in its every phase, and sat dreaming till the old donna (she had seemed old all those years ago) would come to call her in, and she would silently follow the old woman under the vine trellis which formed a closely woven flat roof over her head, to the half-broken-down terrace on which the house stood; so low a terrace that the Indian corn below grew up to its level, and which was really little more than a walled-up platform, forming the foundation of the house. Then she would quietly find her way into the large half-lighted room, in which her grandfather and her uncle would be discussing prices, and the chances of the silk crop, or Uncle Orlando's doings the last time he had been down to Milan. Unnoticed by either of the two men, Azalea would find her way to her mother's side, where her supper, consisting of a bowl of polenta, awaited her. Her mother never spoke to her much; but she would stroke her hair as she eat, and check her if she made any childish noise that might disturb her grandfather.

Then, when the supper was finished, Annetta would silently take the little girl up to the large bare room in which mother and child slept together; and after a little talk in English—for the mother would not allow the child to grow up without a knowledge of her dead father's tongue—Azalea would get quickly into bed, and gazing again through the uncurtained window on the distant mountains, and gazing and gazing till, unknown to herself, her eyes would close, and dreamy visions of the everlasting snow would succeed those her evening eyes had closed on, and to which her morning eyes would awaken.

She had sometimes, when alone, felt the most passionate longing to revisit her early and beautiful home. And now she was actually to return, to see it again as quickly as steam and horse power could take her; to return to it with Harold, with the one person in whom her deepest feeling, romance, and love found sympathetic response!

The news of her grandfather's fatal illness was hardly a personal sorrow to her. Although she had grown up in his house, she could not be said to have ever loved

him. She had lived with him, indeed, but had been seldom spoken to or noticed by him. She was the child of a marriage which he had not forgiven, and though he was anxious, after Annetta's death, to keep her and lavish on her the care which of late years he had denied his daughter, she had not then been long enough in the old house to feel the change he was anxious to show, and she now remembered him more with awe than affection.

All had been solemn and silent in the white house at Sorrengo, and her chief recollection of her grandfather was of an old man so easily disturbed as to be a constant check on her mirth and gayety. Her mother seldom spoke to her of him, except to warn her that he must not be vexed by any noise; and to instill into her mind that she owed him a deep debt of gratitude from the fact that all the comforts of her life were his gifts. Now that she heard of his probable death, she felt no deeper sorrow than had she heard of the death of some powerful king.

"To be sure, miss, how tasty you are!" interrupted Fanny.

Azalea was suddenly recalled from the world of vines and chestnut groves, blue mountains, and sapphire lakes, to the immediate present.

As she had mused the hat had grown under her fingers, and the result was perhaps better than it would have been had her thoughts been centred on it. Accidentally the gauze had taken the most graceful folds, and the rose had fallen exactly into the right place.

Fanny's exclamation awoke her from her day-dream.

"Yes, I think that will do," she said, "and my packing is finished too. Thank you, Fanny;" and the girl left her.

"I should like a last talk with Uncle John," thought Azalea; "and there's my uncle—I ought to go and thank him, I suppose, for giving in to us. Somehow I don't much like doing that. I was not a bit afraid of him when he opposed us; but I feel rather shy now, and would rather keep out of his way. Madge used to say it was easy enough to forgive those who injure us, but very hard to forgive those we injure. I wonder if that is true. I am afraid I am not as grateful as I ought to be. Anyhow, I must go and thank him, whether I like it or not."

So, with an effort, Azalea went down to the library, where her two uncles were still sitting discussing the wonderful change that had come over their uneventful lives since the morning.

Now that he had put it out of his power to make any further objections, Mr. Chiltern was disposed to make the best of this marriage. As Harold had said, it was partly the strangeness of his news that had given such force to his father's opposition, joined to the disappointment that he felt at not having the woman he wished for as his daughter-in-law. He had fully realized that this was impossible during these last few weeks; and now the unexpected hope that Azalea might, after all, be an heiress, caused an unreasoning reaction in her favor; this, joined to the natural pleasure he felt at seeing the delight his consent had given his boy, combined to put him into a high good-humor.

Though a man of learning and a scholar, in some practical things Mr. Chiltern was often unreasoning, and swayed by the feeling of the moment.

Without much reason he had opposed Harold, and now with but little more he conceded all to him. Things affected him very much as they found him, and perhaps his ready assent to-day may not have been altogether uncaused by his having awaked in the morning after an unusually good night, and hence being ready to believe that every thing that was was for the best.

When, therefore, Azalea somewhat timidly entered the library, her uncle greeted her almost affectionately.

"Well, Azalea," he said, "have you packed up? You young people are to have your way, after all, you see."

"You are very kind, uncle," answered Azalea. "I will do all I can to make Harold happy. It is very good of you to let him take me to Lugano."

"I could hardly do otherwise, my dear. You must not neglect your grandfather, and you can not go to him alone."

"Thank you very much," was all Azalea could say. "Have you any thing for me to do at the school, Uncle John?" she asked, turning to the vicar.

"I will come down there with you," said Mr. Purvies, rising. "Why, it's past twelve; how I have wasted my morning!" he added, as he closed the library door behind him. "You two children have taken three hours to talk about."

"And I shall want you to waste a fourth on me," said Azalea, laughing. "I can't go away without a lecture, so let me come into your garden and give me one."

"Azalea is a fine girl, certainly," thought Mr. Chiltern, when left alone. "And if—if only Chiltern can be got by some means, I should not so much regret this marriage. But I am foolishly sanguine to hope it. Why, five hundred pounds would sound a grand sum to an Italian; and when the innkeeper speaks of the old Jew's wealth, I dare say he means some such sum."

So spoke reason; but his sanguine hopes suggested that perhaps Azalea might find ten or even twenty thousand pounds await-

ing her; and what might not Harold, gifted as he seemed to be with business talents, do with such an amount?

"This is worse than London, childie," said the vicar, as he paced his little garden, with Azalea hanging affectionately on his arm. "I could never have given you up with a good grace to any one but Harold, and I only half like giving you up to him."

"It's not giving me up at all, Uncle John," answered Azalea; "it's only binding me still closer to Dillon and to you all. Fancy, if I had married any one in London: that would have been really losing me, and I should have felt, too, as if I were losing you all; but I don't now. Marrying Harold seems only to link me so firmly to all my old friends that nothing can ever now divide us."

"But I shall miss you sadly in my daily life, all the same."

"So shall I you. But Harold is sure to be down here whenever he can spare time from his work. We shall luckily have nowhere else to go to. His friends are my only ones, so there can be no difference between us as to where we shall spend our holidays. But you will come up and see us in London, too, won't you, Uncle John? Harold says we are not to live in London, which I am glad of, it's so stifling to live opposite brick walls; but somewhere just outside, where green fields and lanes are still to be found, and near enough to go in very often to hear good music and see a few pictures. I shall so like seeing all those beautiful things in London with you! I am sure you will help me to think them even more beautiful than I do now. We will go to Westminster Abbey together, and I am sure its beauty will help you to love your own Dillon arches even better than before."

"That's right. That's the way to put it. I never like being told that seeing more beautiful places will put me out of conceit with my old favorites. I believe that seeing new places and things ought to make me appreciate the old ones still more."

"I am sure you are right, Uncle John. I sometimes think there must be an immense deal of unappreciated beauty in the world; for the longer you look at a building or picture or view, the more you find to admire in it; and not only in that individual one, but in every thing that is beautiful. I mean, that knowing one beautiful view will make you care for and see more in all beautiful views; and with pictures it is the same."

"The world nowadays seems in such a hurry, I dare say a great deal does escape its notice," returned Mr. Purvies. "And not only in matters of beauty. The longer you ponder over any science or branch of learning, and I will add religion, the more you find there is in it. As, when looking over a wide landscape, in what at first appears indistinct, as you look longer you will discover villages and church-steeples—so often in a religion, which at first sight you may be tempted to describe as simple error, when you study it thoroughly, you find that what had struck you was only a vulgar incrustation which had grown over an old belief, containing probably one side of a living truth. I don't fancy there are really any short cuts to truths. Even if you grasp them suddenly and intuitively, I believe they never make any real impression till well thought over and meditated on. Most truths sound mere words to me, till I have been through the process of working them out for myself."

"Those immensely large numbers are a case in point," answered Azalea. "If I am told a star is a thousand millions of miles from us, it does not really seem so far to my imagination as when I hear India is four thousand miles off. I can master the one, but I can't in the least the other, and so it makes no impression at all."

"Then the practical lesson to draw is, that we should ponder well over every fact and idea that is prescribed to us, till we have drawn every possible reflection from it. None will make any deep impression till you have."

"I don't think it will."

"Then, Azalea, beware of overcrowding your life—I mean your inner as well as your outer life; beware of the modern tendency for smatterings. Don't entertain any subject if it is not worth reflecting deeply on, or if it is really beyond you. You ought to know your own powers by this time. In youth a great deal of time is wasted, before we can fairly know what we can do and what we can not; but by this time, my dear child, you ought to have no doubt as to what your mind can master; and if you recognize any subject as decidedly beyond your powers, do not attempt it."

"No, I won't. I will take time over any thing I touch at all, as you have always told me to do. But is that the only lesson I can get this morning?" she asked, smiling.

"I don't know that you want many lessons, dear child," answered the vicar, gently pressing her arm. "I need hardly tell you to love your husband and to be a good mother to your children; and if I add, come to Dillon as often as you can, I have very little more to say."

"Harold will feel with me there—that all our spare time ought to be spent with his father."

"Luckily, he will. There he is, calling eagerly for you. Now, I suppose, I shall have no more words with you till Christmas. He will want you all this afternoon."

"Uncle John," said Harold, coming quickly toward them. "There, will you look if

that license is all right? And here, 'Zalea, I have got a train-book and all. If we can reach Dover by one o'clock, we can easily be in Paris by to-morrow evening. We must catch the 9.45 train from Heytesbury; then we shall get the express to Reading, and so to Redhill and Dover. I shall telegraph to each junction to get the train kept for us."

Harold was very excited, and much pleased with the prospect of a sudden journey, in which speed really was of moment, besides being overjoyed at his immediate marriage. He was still boy enough to find an additional pleasure in its coming off, as he expressed it, like a fire-work. Azalea was much calmer, and only said:

"I don't think, dear Harold, there will be the slightest occasion to telegraph. The trains all run on purpose to fit in with the boat."

"Ah, but I mean to make every thing doubly sure. You shall sleep in Paris. I don't mean you to get knocked up by losing your rest—you sha'n't travel at night; but we will go as fast as we can in the day-time. On Thursday we will go from Paris to Basle, on Friday to Lucerne; and, if we are lucky, perhaps to the top of the pass; then Saturday to Lugano. I can telegraph about horses for the pass from Paris."

"Will that be our best route?"

"Yes, dearest, I think so. I have found that it will be the shortest by some hours. But we *must* catch the early train here, so we ought not to leave the door later than a few minutes before nine. Will eight o'clock be too early for your part of the business, uncle?" asked Harold, rather more gravely.

"No, I think not. I never married any couple quite so early in the morning before, but of course there is no reason against it."

"Then we will be married at eight. It takes about half an hour, I suppose, and then we shall have half an hour for our breakfast and start. Dear me, how happy I am!" continued Harold, throwing his arms to the back of his head. "To have all those tedious months, when I thought we should be separated, vanish in this way! It was worth while to feel as disappointed as I did when I first came home to feel so overjoyed now. I must go and tell my father what we have settled; and then, Azalea, let's have an hour or two on the downs."

"Surely, Harold," said the vicar, "you will have enough of your cousin for the rest of your life. You need not take her away this last afternoon."

"No, dear uncle, I sha'n't. Of my wife, I may; but this is my very last chance of a talk with my cousin."

"One day sooner or later matters but little," thought the vicar to himself. "But the selfishness of a man in love is one of the wonders of the world. He has no more idea that he is taking the last star out of my life than his father had forty years ago, when he stole away my sun and left me in darkness."

But Azalea had some sympathy with the vicar, and as Harold left them she took his hand, and said:

"Dear Uncle John, how I do wish we need not be parted! How I wish Harold could find some work which would not take him from home! If we could still live here when we are married, it would be perfection. Could not Harold take to farming?"

"Not if he ever hopes to be master of the Chase, I fear. He might easily lose all he has made by farming, but is not likely to add to his capital. I don't so much mind your going to London; but if it ever should come to Harold's carrying you off to India, I shall think too much is being sacrificed to this most unlikely prospect of winning back the Chase."

"I think hardly any sacrifice can be too great for such an object. If Harold fails, it can never again belong to his family. When I think of that, I almost wish I had not promised to marry him at once, but made him go back and work another ten years in India."

"No, dear, you would have been wrong to have done that. Suppose, in winning Chiltern, Harold had lost you, don't you think it would have been worse than any apple of the Dead Sea to him? I can imagine nothing sadder than gaining an end we have been working for, when the loss of what we most value in the world has made life bitter to us. Now, whatever the Fates may have in store for Harold, as long as you are by his side he is secure in much that makes real happiness in life."

And so, between moralizing and talking, the few last hours that Azalea could spend with her old friend wore themselves away.

One more saunter on the downs with Harold, and the shades of her last evening of maiden life at Dillon began to fall fast.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE arrangements for the next morning were very simple.

At a few minutes to eight Mr. Chiltern and the cousins would quietly walk down to the church, where, with no spectators except perhaps the Miss Foleys, and a few villagers whom curiosity or affection might attract to the wedding, the vicar would give them God's blessing and set his seal to their love. Mr. and Mrs. Harold Chiltern would then return to the house as quietly as they had come, and Azalea would hastily change her white dress for a gray, which Fanny had discovered among the many new dresses Madge had provided for Ems, for the girl would not hear of Azalea's favorite

black. Then, having drunk her coffee, she would be hurried into the post-chaise, which Harold had insisted must pass the night with its old gray horses at Dillon, and they would drive as fast as possible to Heytesbury, with a good chance of catching the train by which Harold was so anxious they should travel.

The morning awoke soft and misty, as mornings in September are wont to be; when the summer does not seem gone, but only to be partially veiling itself.

Fanny and Mrs. Price were both early in Azalea's room. This was far from the sort of wedding Master Harold ought to have, thought the latter; but she would do her best to make his bride a credit to him. This Azalea certainly was, though perhaps not altogether owing to Mrs. Price, but more to her own taste and skill in arranging the sprays of orange-blossom, and to her great beauty, which suited well the long-flowing white muslin she wore, and was hardly hidden by the large tulle veil which enveloped her. A man must have been hard to please who saw much amiss in her.

As she came down the old staircase, looking like a beautiful white vapor in the early morning, Harold, who was impatiently waiting for her in the hall, rushed to meet her, exclaiming,

"Oh, my empress! you most beautiful of flowers! my own white Azalea! come to my father in the library for one moment before we start."

Mr. Chiltern had never yet seen Azalea out of the ordinary dark mourning-dress which as a rule she wore, and was now more struck by her beauty than he had ever been before; he felt pleased that, at any rate, his son's wife was handsome.

"You shall be as a daughter to me, Azalea," he said, touched more by her beauty than he had ever been by her goodness. "If you make Harold happy, I will be content." And he gently kissed her smooth white forehead.

It was the first time he had embraced her.

"Thank you, dear father," said Harold, much pleased. "And now we must be off."

The short service was soon over. The solemn pledges were given on either side, and the two existences sacramentally merged into one, and the husband and wife walked home alone, preceding the vicar and his friend by a few minutes.

Harold held Azalea's arm firmly as they walked the few steps, but neither spoke. The religious service, the solemn vows they had exchanged, threw a shade of something akin to awe around them.

When they reached the house and entered the empty library, Harold clasped Azalea in his arms.

"We are one at last," he said—"one till death us do part, and one still far beyond, one into an endless eternity, I firmly believe. Now let the worst happen that may, nothing can part us. What a real blessing it is when duty and happiness join hands, as they do in a true marriage! It is now my first duty to love you, and tend you, and be all the world to you, as it has always been my greatest happiness."

Azalea's only answer was a long, loving look out of her calm brown eyes. Her peaceful face was in no way agitated, only more calmly happy than usual.

Harold did not speak again for a few minutes, but they stood silently holding one another's hands, till they heard their father and uncle approaching. Then Harold roused himself suddenly, exclaiming,

"Come, time is getting on. I forgot for the moment that we were in a hurry."

"I will change my dress at once," was Azalea's answer as she left the room.

At the door she met the vicar, who took her hand, and warmly pressing it, only said,

"God bless you, my dear child!" And then as Azalea vanished he turned to Harold and said, heartily, "I wish you joy, Harold! You have won a good wife, and you deserve her as much as any man can deserve a perfect woman—simply not at all."

"Ah, where should we be if we only had our deserts? I *am* one of the lucky ones, who has got overpoweringly more than he deserves. But it's getting on for nine, and there's no time for moralizing. Azalea must have some breakfast, for she has a long journey before her. I will send it to her in her room; she can eat up there more quietly than with all of us talking round her."

Soon the old Heytesbury fly was at the door; the hurried partings were over, and Harold and Azalea driving along the white chalk road as fast as the ancient horses could draw them.

Of course, they not only caught their train, but had an unnecessarily long time to wait at the station; and that night they slept at a hotel in Paris, close to the station from which they were to start for Basle the next morning.

What a change it was! Quiet Dillon enveloped in a soft mist in the morning, and the gas-lit boulevards in the evening! The change seemed far greater than the one from London to Ostend.

"Harold, I feel as if we had been married a week," said Azalea, as they alighted at the hotel. "Madge says there's an undiscovered connection between time and distance."

"Maybe; but I don't mean to allow our honey-moon to be shortened in time because we many lengthen it by locomotion. You will feel the change almost as much to-morrow evening, when we are nearing your beloved mountains."

Another long day spent in railway traveling, and they were able to pass the evening of the morrow on the balcony we most of us remember so well, which overhangs the rushing Rhine.

The moon was shining on the water; the air, which had been almost sharp in England, was here soft and mild. It was the kind of evening on which even a greater effort is needed to close the shutters, and in doing so to shut out the beautiful outer world, than is needed for the contrary trial of opening the windows on a dreary winter scene, and leaving a warm nest in order to rush into it.

"I think, Azalea," said Harold, as they sat on the balcony, "I will telegraph to Lugano and ask how your grandfather is. If he is no worse, and likely to linger for months, I don't like to run the risk of knocking you up by such fast traveling. You have had two hard days, and I should like you to rest at Lucerne, if possible."

"I am not tired, dear," answered Azalea. "You see I am very strong. Traveling is not nearly so tiring as London, and being alone with you is rest in itself."

"My darling!" murmured Harold. "Still, though you have stood these two days so well, you might like a few hours' quiet at Lucerne. I will telegraph to the Hôtel du Parc, both for rooms and for information as to your grandfather's state."

He did so; but the answer was not very re-assuring; it ran thus:

"Rosario is weaker—anxiously expecting Miss Chiltern. Rooms ready on the 14th."

This message was delivered to Harold at breakfast the following morning.

"I fear we must not loiter after that," he said, handing it across to Azalea. "We ought to have gone to Lucerne last night; but perhaps, after all, we can reach Andermatt this evening, if the horses are good. I am glad we are sure of a relay."

They were luckily breakfasting at so early an hour that they were able to catch the first steamer of the day down the Lake of Lucerne.

How beautiful it all was! Azalea sat on the deck of the little boat wrapped in thought, and absorbed by recollections of her childhood. She had not seen mountains since she had left Lugano, ten years ago, and this return to them filled her with delight. As they neared the end of the lake, she looked up the valley, which gradually steepened as it ascended, till it reached the St. Gothard peak, on which she had so often and so long gazed as a child.

"So this is the other side of my mountains," she said. "You can't think, Harold, how often as a child I have wondered and wondered what the world could be like on this side—this world in which we now are. I used to people it in my fancy with wicked fairies and spirits. All the cold winds in spring blew from over these hills; and I used to fancy some monster must live here whose delight it was to check the early green leaves of the vines and mulberry-trees; and I used to be so curious to know how the monster worked the wind, and what his country was like. I can remember quite well," she continued, "when I was a very little girl, one day such an intense longing seized me to see what the other side of my world was like, that I started off across the fields for the Bellinzona road all by myself. It was one day after rain, when the mountains looked so near that I thought I could reach them in a very short time; but after walking on till I lost my way, I was found sitting by a stream crying, and some peasants brought me back ignominiously to my mother. I was scolded, and sent to bed without any supper, and that made me associate this side of the hills with still more dreadful things."

"What a lonely childhood you must have had!"

"Yes; it was lonely, so far as that I never had other children to play with, but it was not unhappy. I think I should not have cared so much for all the beautiful scenery around me if I had had children to distract me from it. As it was, I grew up loving the hills and streams and flowers so intensely that the enjoyment of them was alone happiness to me. And then I used to people the mountains with all kinds of wild, fanciful beings, and they were a world in themselves to me. The wicked, cold spirit lived over the St. Gothard, and the gentle, kind spirit behind a high hill they told me overhung Maggiore. Then," she went on, "I remember once climbing to the top of Salvatore, and seeing the plains stretching out far away down to Milan; and plains were such a new experience to me then that I was puzzled at first to guess what sort of spirits were likely to inhabit that flat district; and at last I determined that it must be the abode of the dull, stupid spirits, who were neither good nor bad, but simply uninteresting."

"And used you to people Dillon downs with fairies when you first came home?"

"No, I was older then; besides, I had you to ride and talk with, and Uncle John. He was always more with me than any one, even my mother. England, too, is such a busy, working country; it is not easy to fancy spirits inhabiting a place where no effect happens without a cause. The spirits don't work, you know; they speak the word, and it is done; and that is so easy to fancy in Italy, where a shower of rain or a couple of days' sunshine will change the whole face of nature. At Dillon the downs were just the same, summer or winter: there was real-

ly nothing for the spirits to busy themselves about. Besides," she added more seriously, "you must remember I knew nothing of religion and of the True Spirit and all its attendant angels till I came to England, and Uncle John unfolded a far more wonderful and really spiritual world than any my wildest fancies had ever imagined."

"I am so glad I shall see your early home!"

"So am I. I don't think there can be a more lovely spot under the sun. I suppose this is the end of the lake?"

"Yes; there is William Tell's Chapel on your left, and I dare say that is our carriage awaiting us at the landing-place. The people tell me the roads are in good condition, so I have no doubt we can reach Lugano by to-morrow night."

They were soon seated in a light traveling-carriage, and drove off at a rapid pace for the few miles of comparatively level road before the real ascent begins.

How grandly wild the pass was!

The impatient river hurried down the valley with an eagerness to escape into the lake which seemed to increase more and more as they mounted, so furiously did it rush from stone to stone, making a cascade of some miles in length. The black pines stood up stiff and funereal-like against the cloudless September sky on either side. As they neared the top the vegetation became scantier and scantier, till at last even the pines and short grass ceased to grow, and nothing but bare rock and lichen remained, with patches of snow here and there in crevices.

"I remember nothing of this sort on my side of the mountains," said Azalea. "I think if I had succeeded in climbing over here as a child, and found this fierce, desolate-looking pass, my impression of it as the abode of some wicked monster would have been stronger than ever. Does it not look as if the impersonation of a cold wind might make his dwelling here?"

"It is very chilly, certainly," replied Harold, as they turned a corner, and a sudden cold draught caught them. "Let me wrap this shawl more closely round you. What a change it is from the sunny lake! This must be the Devil's Bridge, I suppose. I believe it's a wonderful engineering feat. Your instinct was right, you see—a devil must have lived somewhere up here, and have helped the natives to make this bridge. It certainly does look as if unaided human skill could never have done it."

"If what we hear of the Swiss character and love of gain be true, that may be a parable," said Azalea. "Nature said, 'You can not pass that way,' but greed answered, 'How many more moneyed strangers would come along, strewing gold as they go, if only a bridge were made;' and then the devil, who is always ready to help people to become rich, came to the rescue and offered his help, and, on condition that a few lives were lost to him, promised success. So with his help it was made; and if some half-dozen poor men were killed in the work, why, the rest of the inhabitants were made all the richer."

"And we find it very convenient," answered Harold, laughing. "Ah, Azalea, if your parable is a true one, we ought to have chosen some other pass. I wish, however, that it was a little lighter, so that I might better see the devil's handiwork."

The evening had already closed in when they reached the little mountain inn at Andermatt. A cheerful wood fire was blazing in their room, which the chilliness of the mountain air made very acceptable; and playing at winter for one evening was a pleasant change.

But summer returned with more beauty than ever next morning, after they had crossed the top of the pass, and the rapid descent began. Every thing was reversed from yesterday; and now each mile brought before them more and more smiling scenes. The fir-trees were soon exchanged for beautiful chestnut groves, the first sight of which made Azalea clap her hands with delight.

"Now I feel as if we were really going home—only look at the chestnuts and vines and fig-trees! Oh, Harold," she exclaimed, with tears, half of joy and half of excitement in her eyes, "is not this a beautiful world, here in this mountain country?"

"Dear Azalea, I had no idea you loved the mountains so much. I shall feel very cruel in taking you to live in a London suburb."

"It's seeing them again with you, dearest, that makes half the delight," answered Azalea. "The mountains would be duller than plains if enjoyed alone; and the suburb will be as gladsome as the mountains when shared with you."

When they had passed Bellinzona and were nearing Lugano, Azalea felt somewhat uneasy and nervous. She had always stood much in awe of her grandfather; and now she felt frightened and distressed at the prospect of seeing him alone, and perhaps dying.

She was too real and true to imagine that she felt a conventional affection for her grandfather which had never existed before, as people with more imagination than truth in their natures are wont to do for the dead or dying. She was longing to be of use to him, and to soothe his last moments if she found it in her power to do so; but that he was now dying could not change the past fact of his never having succeeded in gaining more than a dutiful gratitude from her, that he had never taken the trouble to win her love, and that he had parted with her without any signs of regret.

At last the goal was in sight, the church on the hill was passed, and the small colonnaded town was entered.

"We will go to the hotel first," said Harold, "and if there is no immediate danger, I should prefer your waiting till the morning before you have the excitement of meeting your grandfather and visiting the old scenes. You have borne up bravely through this long journey; but now you look exhausted, and I should like you to have a good night."

This was possible. The landlord was expecting them, and had just heard that Rosario was sleeping peacefully.

A child from Sorrengo had run down to say that, as he had given up the prospect of seeing his grandchild that evening, he had allowed the doctor to give him a draught which in all probability would insure his sleeping late into the following day. He was in no pain, only sinking from old age; he might live a week longer, but hardly more.

"Then we will have some supper and go to bed, Azalea, and we can walk up to Sorrengo after breakfast in the morning. Do you think it will be well for Mrs. Chiltern to stop at the village with her grandfather?" Harold asked of the landlord.

"No, sir; no English lady could live in such a house, I am sure."

"But I am not altogether an English lady," returned Azalea. "You forget that ten years ago the old white house was my home."

"Well, we will see in the morning what your grandfather would wish. I am sure you ought now to get to bed as soon as you can."

"Oh, Harold, not quite yet. Look at the moon shining over Salvatore. I can't go in yet. Isn't it a lovely lake? I never knew how much I cared for it till now that I see it again. Come down to the water's edge for ten minutes."

Azalea was unusually excited, and it was with difficulty she was persuaded at length to go upstairs, and even then she ran out on the balcony of their window, which overlooked the lake. At length she was in bed, but still gazing out on Salvatore with loving eyes, till nature, successfully driven back more than once, at length won the day, and she fell off into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AZALEA did not wake till late next morning, when her husband was standing over her with a cup of coffee in his hand.

"Well, my bird, so you have awaked at last. I would not have you disturbed. Do you know it is past ten?"

"Dear Harold, how I have slept! I ought to have been with my grandfather before now," Azalea exclaimed, in dismay.

"Do not hurry, dear; he is still dozing. Drink your coffee before getting up. I am glad to see that when left to yourself you have so comfortable a faculty for sleep. You have been up at cruelly early hours, and worked very hard for the last four days, and, I am sure, deserve a little rest this morning."

"But my grandfather, Harold. We must not forget the very reason for our being here."

"No. But you need not be uneasy. I was up at Sorrengo half an hour ago and saw him. He is still under the influence of last night's draught, and, the doctor says, never really rouses himself till after midday."

"Thank you so much for going! Did he notice you?"

"No; he was lying like a sleeping child; so peacefully that it is difficult to believe he is so near his end. We were right to hurry, Azalea; the doctor does not think he can live many more days. He was expecting you all yesterday, and it was only when our telegram arrived, saying we could not be at the hotel till past ten, that he allowed himself to be put to sleep. The doctor fancies that now he imagines that it is your mother who is coming. He keeps murmuring about Annetta, and her going off to Rome. Did he ever call you Annetta?"

"No, never. Perhaps I shall be a greater comfort to him if he can fancy I am his daughter. I am sure he must have loved her, and me he hardly ever noticed. We shall see soon. I shall be ready in half an hour, and then we will go up."

They climbed the steep hill behind the hotel, and were soon under the vine trellis leading to the white house.

Azalea's heart beat fast as she neared it. The old terrace was still more broken down than she remembered it, but, surrounded by all the rich autumnal vegetation and the climbing vines, it looked far from unpicturesque. With one hasty glance at the well-remembered, much-loved view, Azalea entered the large room which in former days had served for all family purposes. The old donna came forward to meet her, and, starting back, exclaimed:

"Why, if it's not the Signora Annetta come back again—not my little girl! Signorina, you *are* like your mother. This must content the master. No English knavery could conjure up a grandchild so like his daughter; though he will have it they can do most things they can make money by. And a great deal of money it is too, signorina. After the young master died, master was bent on leaving something that even in England would sound a large sum, and he has been very lucky. Why, he told me

I was to have this house, because you would never miss its value, and it must be worth ten thousand lire. Fancy old Maddalena owning a house worth all that!" and the old lady chuckled to herself over the idea of her coming riches, and would have begun again, had not Azalea checked her.

"But, Maddalena, let us go to my grandfather. He is awake now, and I must lose no time in seeing him."

"Rest content," answered the old woman, "I will take you to him. But rest content, the money is yours. The will was made two months back, and it was only ten days ago that master fancied he should not die happy till he knew that no English rascals would be able to deceive him after his death, by bringing forward some lady who was no grandchild of his. But, though he fidgeted for your coming, the lawyer has never been here since. You may be sure I should note his coming, for have I not to think of my house? I know it is to be mine now; but if the lawyer had come again that might all be changed. The will went away to the lawyers, and till he comes again there can be no fresh will."

"But still I want to see my grandfather," said Azalea, somewhat impatiently. "Never mind about the lawyer and the will."

"Never mind!" muttered the old lady, as she led the way upstairs. "Never mind! *Santo Diavolo!* but it will be a different matter when she knows how much it is. Why, the lawyer said he had never had the drawing-up of such a will before, and he who has been down as far as Milan making wills."

Azalea found her grandfather lying on a small bed, propped up with pillows. He was looking very old and feeble, and a half-vacant, unconscious expression was on his face. His long white beard flowed down over his chest, and gave him a patriarchal and imposing appearance. He did not seem at first to notice Azalea's entrance; but, when she came to his bedside and took his hand, he slowly turned his head and fixed his eyes on her.

"Ah, Annetta, my girl," he said, feebly, "you have been long away, but you come in time. And the little one—is she with you? I see you are my Annetta; no English rogues could change you. I should have known you anywhere. You always had a soft, cool hand—stroke my forehead; it is hot and weary."

Azalea did not try to disabuse the old man, but simply did as she was bid, and gently stroked his head with a hand that was as soft and cool as ever her mother's could have been; and her grandfather's eyes soon closed again, and he appeared to doze.

There was nothing more to be done; Rosario's wandering senses did not fully return, and he never realized that Azalea was other than his daughter.

She each day stopped up at Sorrengo, so as to be at hand whenever her grandfather called for her; and it was only after he had been given a soothing draught that insured his sleeping for the night, that she returned to the hotel, or ventured out with Harold to breathe the fresh air, and to explore the old and well-loved scenes of her childhood. If she could get no farther, there was the little shrine at hand where they could go and watch the sun setting over as beautiful a scene as any in the neighborhood.

"Is it not lovely, Harold?" said Azalea one evening, as they sat on the fern-bank under the chestnut-trees.

They had then been some five or six days at Lugano.

"Is not my view beautiful?" she continued. "My imagination has not, I think, exaggerated; it is really as lovely as I have pictured it to myself all these long years."

"Even Chiltern, should it ever be our home, will hardly make up to you for the loss of this country," answered Harold; "and as to a suburb of London—when I think of it, I am tempted to wish your grandfather had reversed his will, and left his money to old Maddalena, and that charming old tumble-down house to us. We might live quite happily here on two hundred pounds a year, and never trouble our heads about money-making again."

"Doubtlessly we might, if we were a couple of mere women; but not as it is—one of us being a highly energetic man, bent on doing something in the world. I should be very sorry, Harold, if you could be content to spend your days looking even at this view, instead of making your way in the world. If we are ever rich enough to indulge in occasional trips, we might perhaps come here."

"Yes, dear, we will. Of course, seriously, I could never be happy leading an idle life. Do you know, Azalea, I begin to think you may be of use to me in a way we never expected—that you and your grandfather may help me to success."

"How is that?"

"Why, suppose he has left you a few thousand pounds. Allowing for all old Maddalena's probable exaggeration, I think it possible he may have made a good thing of this silk business; and spending, as he did, next to nothing, money rolls up very fast. Well, a few thousand pounds would make a great difference to me in the City. Say he has left you five thousand pounds—why, if it is not tied up in the disagreeable way trustees in England tie up a girl's money, I might be able to double it in a few years' time."

"Could you really, Harold?" said Azalea, vacantly. She knew nothing of money, and believed implicitly every thing Harold told her. "Why, then we should have ten thousand pounds! That sounds a great deal."

"Yes; and then if I could double that I should see my way a little. You know we need not touch the interest, as I am sure of my eight hundred a year from Macgregor & Co."

"Why, then my five thousand may go on rolling up, as you call it, till there is enough to buy back Chiltern. Fancy, Harold, if, after all, I could be a help instead of a hinderance to you! I should be so happy! I should not have done you the injury Madge fancied I did by becoming your wife."

"Injury!" cried Harold, impatiently. "Don't talk about Madge! I have no patience with her for having teased you with such nonsense. Don't speak of it again—it only makes me angry. Do you think we have time to cross the valley and mount up to that church? You told me we could see the other arm of the lake from that point."

"Yes, so we can. I'll just see if my grandfather is still quiet, and if so, I will come."

In a few minutes Azalea rejoined her husband, and then they started. They strolled through the chestnut wood, along the running stream, past the hamlet of cottages, and into the meadows, where, in that well-watered land, the peasants were tossing about their third, or maybe fourth, crop of hay, and so reached the opposite hill, which they mounted, passing again through a cluster of chestnut-trees and under vines, till at length they came to a paved way, which led to the top of the hill where the church was built. On either side were placed shrines, containing representations of the fourteen Stations of the "Via Crucis," which told the old and yet ever new story of the Sacred Passion; it may be in rude art, but yet in art which left its mark alike on the hearts of cultured and uncultivated—on the hearts of all, indeed, but those whose eyes are sealed by prejudice. Such are too blind to do more than "protest" against the faith and light of others; and their appreciation of religious art has been deadened by the contemplation from early youth of their own whitewashed walls.

"When I was here last these Stations were an unknown tongue to me," said Azalea, as they passed them. "Very wonderful, but unknown. Harold, I owe every thing to Dillon—all my earthly happiness, and all my hopes for the future. I can not but feel sad when I see my grandfather dying as if these last two thousand years had never been."

"Dearest Azalea, what can we do? If you had been with him before, it might have been different."

"That is just what I feel. If, instead of pleasuring in London these last six months, I had been with him, it might all be so different. He was my grandfather, and he was not a Christian—I ought never to have forgotten that. But somehow my early life, and all connected with it, had faded from my mind; and now, when I come back to it all, my forgetfulness reproaches me."

"It need not do so, dear. Why, your grandfather gave you up entirely; and I do not think my father would have consented to your coming out here except under the present circumstances, nor could you have come alone. No, dearest, don't be vexed with yourself; you could do no more than you have done."

"Still, there always remains the fact that I have been a Christian for more than ten years, and my grandfather is dying a Jew. There must be wrong somewhere."

"Wrong there is, and plenty of it, in the world, only not in you, my sweet one," returned Harold. "Ah, look down at the lake, Azalea! is not the water a true sapphire color?" he added, as they rested against the wall of the church, and the arm of the lake which runs up to Agno came in sight. "Well, this is certainly a beautiful land; each view seems to surpass the last. We have not time, I fear, this evening to walk down to Agno; but you must take me all round there some day."

"Yes, I will; but not now. I ought to be getting back to my grandfather. I have been more than an hour away."

It would not, however, have now signified to poor old Rosario had Azalea remained for days gazing down at the blue lake.

When she had seen him close his eyes an hour or two back, it was for the last time. He never again opened them, but passed away quietly in his sleep the same evening.

Harold and Azalea were startled by the change visible when they returned from their walk, and had mounted together to his room.

"I think our work here is over," said Azalea, softly.

"Yes; he has gone at last. I hope our coming eased his last moments. You have well done your duty this past week, and you must not now grieve. No daughter could have done more to soothe and tend him."

"If he had but been a Christian," said Azalea, "I should not have a regret. But this seems so sad."

"God is very merciful, dear; trust in him, and do not repine at what it really was out of your power to prevent."

"I will not be distrustful; but it is sad I may not even put a cross to mark the place where he is buried."

The old Jew was laid in his last earthly resting-place the following evening; and, after the meagre ceremony was over, Harold accompanied the lawyer to his office in the town, for the purpose of learning the real truth as to Rosario's savings, which, by the time he was in his grave, in the imagina-

tions of the villagers of Sorrengo had swollen to a fabulous sum.

Old Maddalena followed too, but was not admitted into his office by the lawyer.

"Don't trouble me now," he said, "while I settle matters with the signor. The house is yours, and five thousand lire besides. You could not read the will if I showed it you; so take my word for it, and sleep happy to-night."

"Five thousand lire *and* the house!" exclaimed Maddalena. "Merciful heavens! how good God is! Thank Heaven, I was always a true servant to my master. How my conscience would prick me now, if I had ever neglected him!"

If the one heiress was overpowered at the certainty of moderate wealth, the chance of very much greater wealth did not much affect the other.

When Harold left Azalea, and went into the town with the lawyer, she had forgotten for the moment the will and its unknown contents. Harold had gone with this man on business—a word which to the feminine mind represents every transaction, from the buying of a horse to the burying of the dead—and the prospect of a fortune coming to her from her grandfather had faded from her mind. She wandered musingly to her favorite seat by the shrine, and there sat gazing on the distant mountains till her husband should come to her.

But if Azalea was indifferent as to her grandfather's will, I can not truthfully say that Harold was equally so.

The gaining of a large fortune had been too long before him as an object in life, for him to hear unmoved the floating rumors of great wealth that now reached him. A man must really have been engaged in business himself to understand the full value of money, to realize all its power for good in the world, and, alas! often all its power for evil in the individual either blessed or cursed with its possession, as the case may be.

The work of regaining Chiltern had ever stood before Harold as all but a vocation in life. For the sake of its possible possession he had entered on a career that was distasteful to him; had left his pleasant college home, and given up his flattering university prospects, all for the bare chance of some day being once more a Chiltern of Chiltern. He could not be indifferent to the possibility that the old Jew's savings might make that a reality which had been so long his favorite dream. He did not, of course, think that he should receive the required eighty thousand pounds as Azalea's marriage portion; but he was hoping (and the mere hope was enough to excite him) to find a sum which, when assisted by his usual luck, would win back to him the house of his ancestors. Chiltern, too, coming to him from Azalea's hand, would be even more welcome than coming to him as the reward of his own labor. He meant to work hard, in any case, and he loved his wife well enough to be glad that she should be the source of his every joy.

It was, therefore, with an anxious and almost nervous expression on his face that Harold followed the lawyer into a small back room to read this all-important document.

Half an hour later, with hurried steps, he remounted the hill which led to Sorrengo. He never rested, as was his wont, at the little church half-way up, where, after ten minutes' sharp ascent, he usually staid to draw breath, but hurried on. He saw Azalea at her favorite seat as soon as he emerged from under the vines, and hastened to her side. The sun was just setting as he sat down by her.

"You are in time for the beautiful afterglow on the fresh snow," said Azalea. "We ought not to miss one sunset, as I suppose our days here are numbered now."

Harold did not answer.

"Have you done all your business with that man?" Azalea asked.

"No, not quite," he answered. "There will be a great deal to arrange before I have done with him. You know, Azalea, darling, how much of my happiness I have for years owed to you?"

"Dear Harold!"

"Well, my own, it seems I am simply to owe you every thing. Can you guess what sum of money is yours at this moment?"

"No, I can't. Is it a great deal my grandfather has left? Any sum that will really help toward getting back Chiltern?"

"Chiltern we may at last call ours!" said Harold, exultingly. "Only fancy, my beautiful flower being worth some hundred and twenty thousand pounds odd! There, darling! in winning you, have I not won all? And yet I loved you only and solely for your own sweet self, and that you know."

"Has my grandfather left me all that?" asked Azalea, wonderingly.

"Yes, he has, and quite at your own disposal. The lawyer says that for the last fifty years he has been trading quietly but successfully; he always made lucky investments, and spent next to nothing on himself. His son was doing the same for some years, and all their joint earnings come to you. He is not surprised at the sum, though, of course, for these parts it is enormous."

"Dearest Harold, how thankful I am I can be of such use to you!" said Azalea. "I should have been sorry for my grandfather to have left me so much had I still been alone; at least, owning so much money would almost have frightened me. But now there is the money, and there is an

object on which to spend it. Even Madge can not say I have injured you now."

"Don't talk of Madge!" he answered, almost impatiently. "But think of my father, how delighted he will be! You must be generous, dear, and forget that he ever wished otherwise than that we should marry. He has longed all his life to get back the old place."

"I will only be glad that I can help him. Can there be any greater happiness in this world than that of being of use to those we love? And don't I owe every thing to his goodness in sending for me to live with him in England? My feelings now would be very different if I had been living here all these years, and heard for the first time that this large fortune was mine. It would then simply have been a heavy weight. I should have had nothing to spend it on, and no one I loved to give it to. I suppose now we need not hurry home. You won't take the place the Macgregors offered you?"

"No, indeed I sha'n't. I shall go into Parliament, and work hard at politics. And then I must get the estate into proper order, and look after your tenants, for they will be all yours, and I only your steward. Still, you will want a man to help you. Don't fancy you are going to have an idle husband, because you have become a rich wife."

"I know you will never be idle, nor, I hope, shall I. There will be all the old women of Chiltern to look after, as well as of Dillon, and it's so big and scattered. Why, Harold, I think I must have a pony-carriage to go about in; will you let me?"

"What an extravagant demand to come from a young lady owning some five thousand pounds a year!" returned Harold, laughing. "Yes, dear, I think, if we are careful, I may promise that you shall keep a pony-carriage."

"And are we to stop here much longer now?"

"Yes; I think we had better for some few weeks. I must have Gifford out here to look into this business with the Italian lawyer. Such a large sum can not be taken out of its present securities without our having our own lawyer to look into things, and see that all is straight. I dare say, for so important a matter, Gifford will come himself. I wish his father, who sold the place some forty years ago, were still alive. It would give him such real pleasure to see some good come of the clause which my grandfather insisted on, but the lawyer little thought would ever be of use. The prosperity of his clients gives an old family lawyer almost as much pleasure as it can give themselves. I will write at once to my father and to Gifford, and meanwhile we will stop here and be happy. We have only been married ten days, so we have some weeks of real holiday due to us, have we not?"

"Then let us move on a few miles, where we can be really quiet," suggested Azalea. "The Hôtel du Parc is so full and noisy, and all the people about here will stare, and think me a sort of miracle, when they know how rich I have become. Let us go off to a still more lovely part of the lake on the road to Varese. I can remember once driving there as a child; I know it's very lovely, and so quiet."

"But how about a hotel—is there one?"

"There is a little inn—San Pietro. I can remember stopping to get some wine there; a real little Italian *osteria*, where we shall have to rough it rather more than at these big cosmopolitan hotels. But quiet is worth more than luxury, is it not?"

"Yes, dear, that will be very nice. Let us go off there to-morrow morning. We will take a little carriage and keep it there, so as to be able to explore the country every afternoon."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Azalea and Harold kept to the plan which the former had suggested.

Before eight o'clock on the morning following Rosario's funeral, they had breakfasted, and were ready for their start in an *Einspanner*, with their light luggage swung behind. They started on the Luino road, went through Sorrengo, then past the little lake, through Agno, and along the shore of Lugano for a few miles; till, mounting a steep ascent amidst clusters of chestnut-trees, vines, and the still ungathered Indian corn, they reached the little inn, San Pietro, standing alone by the side of the park-like road on which they had been driving.

It was, as Azalea had described it, merely an Italian inn; but large airy rooms, though paved with brick, were at their service; and the complete seclusion of the place was refreshing after the last fortnight of hurry and excitement. Here they settled to stay until the answers to Harold's letters, written on the previous evening, should arrive.

Exploring the beautiful neighborhood gave them plenty of occupation, and together they grew familiar with the distant shores of the fair Maggiore, and visited the interesting Monte Sacro, at Varese. It was a charming fortnight's holiday, filled with infinite delight in the present, and without a care for the future, with nothing in it worthy of record, but one in which they both found fresh enjoyment every moment.

At length the expected interruption to their delightfully Arcadian life came, in the shape of a budget of letters forwarded from Lugano.

Two were for Azalea, and five or six for Harold.

We will first open Harold's business letter from the lawyer. He was delighted with the news Harold had sent him, and would come to them in a few days. He had already had an interview with the Liffords' lawyer, and had told him there was now a chance that his clients would shortly be in a position to claim that the clause which forty years back was simply put into the deed of sale in order to ease an old man's downfall, and was at the time thought to be of no practical value, was actually to be put in force.

Gifford had merely, with professional caution, intimated a hope that his clients would be able to do as he said. He did not actually doubt that the money was there, but it was a large sum for a girl supposed to be penniless to inherit; he would certainly come out at once, and on the spot examine the securities, make such arrangements as were necessary for their transfer, and see that Harold made the most of the fortune of which his wife had suddenly become possessed. The Chilterns could well afford to summon their lawyer to the farther end of the earth, had this fortune really come to them; and should it in the end prove to be *in nubibus*—why, a week's run from Bedford Row to the Italian lakes in fine autumn weather has its charms even for a lawyer.

"That's all right," said Harold, as he put down the lawyer's letter; "Gifford will be here on Thursday. Now let us see what my father says:

"'My dearest Boy'" (so began Mr. Chiltern),—'Heaven bless you as I do this day, and forgive me for having misjudged matters in this affair! You were born to be a blessing to me, and I can without an effort feel grateful to you.

"'It is, I know, a father's business to lay by for his children, not theirs to relieve their parents from care: but the gratification of handing over the property to you in even a better condition than I received it from my father, is denied to me; and I will not allow the thought of the great pleasure that would have given me to damp the joy I feel that, as a fact, Chiltern is ours once more.

"'Give my kind love to Azalea, and may you and she be always and ever happy together! She will not, I know, think the worse of me because, under other circumstances, I could not entirely approve of your marriage; you, my dear Harold, in every respect must be my first consideration, and to this I am sure Azalea will agree. But give her my love, and tell her that I thank her for the service it is in her power to render to the family. Let me hear again soon.

"'Ever your most affectionate father,

"'Philip Chiltern.'"

"Is he pleased . . sked Azalea, anxiously.

Even now she could only think of herself as a second Esther; she still felt as humbly unconscious of any claims to consideration as when she owned but fifty pounds a year.

"He can hardly be displeased," answered her husband, who had his own opinion as to the ungenerous tone of his father's letter, and who thought that a little more enthusiastic gratitude toward his wife would not have been misplaced. It was Azalea, and not himself, who had proved the blessing to them all.

"It is a very kind letter," said Azalea, as she finished reading it. "Fancy, Harold, your father having to thank *me* for any thing! But he has not really to thank me; nothing I can give will cancel the immense debt I owe him. Being once again in this country seems more than ever to bring its greatness before me. I sometimes dream that I am still a Jewess, and wake up in the night with a shudder; and then, when the truth comes back to me, I bless my uncle from the bottom of my heart. Oh, Harold," she exclaimed, enthusiastically, "how good God is! All that I value in the world comes to me from Dillon; and now it is in my power to be of use to those I love at Dillon. Here, listen to Uncle John's kind words:

"'My very dear Child,—So my little Azalea is transformed into a great heiress, and is to be blessed with untold wealth.

"'Well, dear child, may He who sends it give you his grace to use it well! I do not doubt you will, and that when you are enthroned at Chiltern all around you will be the better and the happier for your being there.

"'I know you will do your duty in the larger sphere, as you have always tried to do it in the smaller; and you have my heartiest congratulations on the pleasure that I am sure you must feel at being of such great service to those you love so well.

"'We are all jubilant here. Your uncle is in the highest spirits at the prospect of sleeping again under the old roof; and I am hardly less well pleased that, after all, my children are not to be banished to London, and that we may look forward once more to resuming our past happy daily companionship and intercourse.

"'God bless my rich Azalea, as he has ever blessed the poor one, and believe me, yours affectionately, John Purvies.'"

"And who is your second correspondent, dear?" asked Harold.

"It is Madge. Would you like to hear what she says? I wrote to her from Lugano, to tell her of our marriage. I really could not write before. But I see she has news of her own."

At the risk of wearying the reader, we will try his patience with one more letter, promising that it shall be the last:

"Hôtel Mirabeau, Paris.

"My dear Azalea,—Well, I am sure, you are a nice young couple! To go and get married and allow your best friends to hear of it only through the *Times!* What excuse can you offer? I am curious to know. Master Harold's brain was always inventive; so you, my lovely piece of innocence, must tax it to your utmost for some excuse that I can accept.

"But you know me of old—'The worse you beat me, the better I be;' and no amount of undeserved neglect will make me forget my beautiful flower; so I am going to return good for evil, and send you at once my piece of news. It ought to take a weight off Harold's mind, for, now he is to have one of his own, Kirkwell's master will not covet any other man's wife. Sir Philip is consoled, and he and Lady Tremayne, in the shape of your old Madge, have a hope they may meet you this autumn somewhere about Europe, while on their honey-moon.

"Yes, your Sir Philip is now mine. Shortly after you left Ems, he came out there—of course, *à la récherche* of my 'beautiful friend;' but, alas! she had flown. Still, he staid on to talk about her, and we got very good friends. Then, not so very long ago, we were all startled by a little announcement in the *Times*, and all hope being over, he was wise enough to discover that, after all, he was not broken-hearted, and that it was possible to find consolation elsewhere.

"I dare say you and Harold would consider us dreadfully prosaic and unromantic; but we are very happy, and I mean to settle down and do my duty as a great county lady to perfection. I have had my fling at romance, and didn't find it answer. Kirkwell, I hear, requires a dignified mistress, so I am practicing that kind of thing—not speaking to any one at *table-d'hôte*, and being rather uncivil generally. My mother is very much pleased at the change, and puts it down to your quieting influence, my beauty.

"I wish your husband would soon make his fortune and take Chiltern off our hands. It's a nuisance having two places, and money is always useful.

"We intend to be married here quietly at the embassy, and in a few weeks' time to start southward, and hope to spend the winter in Rome. We don't go to Kirkwell till next autumn. Sir Philip means to have a house in town next season, so I hope we may often meet, though Harold should keep to his plan of taking you off to the suburbs.

"Write and wish me joy, dear. You will, I know, be glad to hear that your old admirer has conquered his despair. Good-bye. With much love, your very affectionate

"Madge.

"P.S.—Reginald disappeared a few days after you left. I have not an idea where he is—very likely shooting lions in Central Africa."

"I am so glad!" exclaimed Azalea. "I think Madge a very good wife for Sir Philip. She has spirits and liveliness for both, and will make a very popular mistress of a large country house. How lucky, too! You see, now she will be glad to be rid of Chiltern. Lady Margaret will still, I suppose, live with her; she is never happy away from Madge."

"And who is Reginald, Azalea?"

"Colonel St. John. Don't you remember him at Ems? He gave me that pretty little copy of Botticelli's Angel, and used to be always with us."

"And was he, too, sighing in vain at your feet," asked Harold, smiling, "like this unfortunate Tremayne?"

"Oh dear, no!" returned Azalea, blushing, "I never thought of such a thing. He is a cousin of Lady Margaret's, you know, and was naturally a good deal with us." And, so far as she knew, she spoke truthfully. "But you must not call Sir Philip unfortunate; he has just won all he wants—a handsome wife."

"Not think a man unfortunate who has to take Madge in exchange for you! I am afraid I must do that."

"Poor dear Madge! I am so glad she is to be happy at last. I could almost envy her a winter in Rome."

"Would you like to go too?" asked Harold. "We will settle to spend the winter there at once, if you will say the word."

"Could we arrange to do so?" asked Azalea, doubtingly. "I should like it of all things. And I tell you what, Harold, my uncle and Uncle John would be delighted to join us there. I heard them not long since talking of the pleasure it would give them to see Rome. Now we all have plenty of money, why should not Uncle John have a holiday?—and we could all see Rome together."

"A first-rate idea! I will write home and suggest it at once; and, by the time we have finished with the lawyer here, I dare say they will be ready to join us. Neither my father nor uncle has left Dillon for years; but I think the prospect of a winter at Rome with us will induce them to move."

"What a difference money does make!" said Azalea, musingly. "I never fancied I should care to be rich, but I do now. I see the power it gives to procure pleasure for those we love."

And in this instance it certainly did.

A greater pleasure could hardly have fall-

en to the lot of the two old scholars of Dillon. To Mr. Chiltern, the prospect of a winter among classical remains, and in the society of his highly cultured son, was one of unmixed delight; and to the vicar the idea of continuing Azalea's education in a place so full of the associations he had himself implanted in her was hardly less attractive.

"I really think," he said, "that Azalea is a person to whom no one need mind being under an obligation. There is no one else in the world to whom I could bring myself to give my hotel bills. But I know it will afford that dear child even more pleasure to give than it will us to take."

Mr. Chiltern winced.

"Husband and wife are one," he answered, "and we may consider ourselves equally Harold's guests."

"Still, as a fact, the fortune is Azalea's," said the old man, who was beginning to be rather ashamed of the littleness which always seemed to appear in his friend when the family obligations to Azalea came to the front.

The fault was one peculiarly distasteful to his generous nature; it vexed him; but still, after a friendship of thirty years, he could not change his feelings. As a son may be pained when, with his growing mental and moral vision, the black spots appear on the idol father of his youth, so with Mr. Purvies now. The friend of his life was a man who was altogether his inferior in all that is ennobling; but he was too old to change now: he must love him to the end, faults and all, and do his best to screen his weaknesses from others.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is too late in my story to attempt to describe our friends' winter in Rome.

After having married our lovers and restored them to the home of their ancestors, what is left but to hint at the advent of an inheritor for the next generation, and to let the curtain fall?

Rome, the eternal, was seen and enjoyed; the winter was over, and the spring in those southern parts was all but past. The violets and the anemones were there giving place to the more showy summer flowers, but at Chiltern the woods were still ablaze with golden primroses, sapphire bluebells, and our modest little northern wood anemone, which takes the place of the many-colored and brilliant flower of the Pamfile Doria.

The lawyers had taken a long, long time over the business, but still it was completed at last; and before May, Chiltern was formally handed over to Harold, strictly entailed on his heirs in perpetuity.

One lovely May day all our friends re-assembled once more at Chiltern. There were Lady Margaret, Madge, and her husband, come to say a last "Good-bye" as owners of the place. It was no source of grief to them to have to retire. Madge had brought her husband a large sum of money instead of a second estate, and he was well pleased at the exchange. Money is always useful, but he hardly valued land that had been but one generation in the family; poor land, too, that did not bring in three per cent., so Sir Philip was cheerful.

Lady Margaret and Madge were both pleased that their old friends should be once more in possession of their own estate. Uncle John was ever ready to rejoice with those who do rejoice. He did so all the more as having in the past borne the blame of Azalea's presence at Dillon; he had now the greater right to boast of the good fortune which had followed on his advice being taken.

The Macgregors also were present. They were perhaps rather in the way, as comparative strangers among a party of old friends must be; but Azalea had insisted on asking them to come and witness this return of the Chilterns to Chiltern.

"They were good to you when we were in want of friends, and if they like they shall come now." It was the first time that she had said *shall* since she had been married.

Mrs. Macgregor, still bent on making eligible acquaintances for her *début* in London, willingly accepted the invitation; and her husband, who had always liked Harold, gladly accompanied her.

There was a grand dinner for the tenants, which began at two and lasted till late on into the afternoon, and served as a welcome introduction to their new landlord. Toasts were drunk, and speeches were made, and the fun increased as the sun gradually declined. Azalea presided at the upper table, and looked as composed and stately as if she had been a grand lady all her life. At last, when the toasts were over, and the fun was growing rather noisy, the guests at the upper table rose.

"Make your escape, darling, as soon as you can," whispered Harold to Azalea, "and come and see the sunset with me from Combewood."

In a few minutes the lover-husband and wife were walking through the wood, which gradually rose to the top of the downs.

It was a lovely May evening; the sky above was cloudless; the air was heavy with the sweet scent of the hawthorn; there was a round moon over their heads, but the sun had an hour or two to travel before he set. At their feet was a carpet of prim-

roses and bluebells; and around them the larches and beeches wore their fresh spring leaves.

Gradually they mounted, walking through the wood on the short green grass, till at length they emerged from the trees on to the open down, and walked along it for a quarter of a mile, till Harold suddenly stopped.

"I wanted to bring you here this evening," he said. "Can not you guess why? Do you remember, ten years ago, our riding to this very spot, and my showing you the Chase below, and my opening my heart to you and telling you of my great ambition? It was odd, was it not? that for years you were the only being to whom I ever spoke of my hopes; and now, if they have become realities, it is only because I have won you as my own sweet wife."

THE END.

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